

*A Theology vol. 7.*  
DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE and USE

OF

PROPHECY.

BY

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*The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy,*

Rev. xix. 20.

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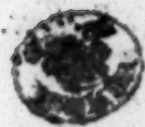
NATURE AND USE

OF

THE

JOHN BRISTED, M. A.

RECTOR OF ST. JOHN'S WYOMING IN



THE TOWN OF JOHN IN THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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# INTRODUCTION.

**T**HERE are few things concerning which men do not differ in their opinions: and there is nothing about which they differ more than they do about what relates to religion. Hence it is that some are ready to conclude that *all* religion, and others conclude the *religion of Christ* to be a very uncertain thing, that admits of but obscure and imperfect evidence. How far this is true, or whether it be true at all, must be left to every impartial enquirer: and I hope I have said enough in the ensuing treatise to decide these points.

All religion, as well as every thing else proposed for our assent, should stand or fall by rational evidence, that is, by such as is fit to determine a reasonable creature; and next to the internal evidence of the usefulness of Christianity, the known and acknowledged reasonableness and excellency of the doctrines and rules it lays down, I can think of none so strong in its favour as *Prophecies*, plainly and undeniably fulfilled: especially such as have been fulfilled a very long time after they were delivered. Nor is there any rational account to be given of such predictions, and such com-

A 2                      plements,

pletions, but that they proceeded from the infinitely wise and good Being; and that they were intended for the use and benefit of men.

Jesus Christ constantly appealed to *Moses* and the Prophets, whose writings are still extant, and we are competent judges of their meaning. Nor can any sincere lover of truth be unwilling to put the Christian cause upon the same issue, that Christ himself put it upon. He professed himself to come from God: and he would not have appealed to Prophecies, had not the Prophets testified of him. His miracles might have proved his mission, as those which *Moses* or *Elijah* did, proved theirs. But he went further, and he declared that the Prophets spoke of him; and that he was the person designed by them in such and such of their writings. Either therefore there is such a thing as Prophecy, or Jesus appealed to a false evidence. Let us then, with him and his Apostles appeal to the Prophets; to them who many hundred years before the birth of Christ remarkably foretold his coming, life, sufferings, death, ascension, dominion; and so many circumstances of the time when these should happen, that no reasonable doubts can remain on this head. It is a very lazy objection, though too commonly urged, that Prophecy is a vague uncertain thing, merely conjectural, capable

ble of being applied to many different events, and owing all the regard it has gained, to the great obscurity of figurative strange language.

I would observe here, that Christians should of all men be most cautious of declaiming against the use of Prophecy; because to this our Saviour has appealed; and his immediate and inspired followers did the same. In the New Testament, and particularly in *St. Paul's* and *St. John's* writings, there are numerous predictions. Nothing therefore can be more absurd, than for Christians to neglect the study of Prophecy—A negligence highly injurious to their own cause, and which infidels never fail to take advantage of. I must add, that Prophecy is not that uncertain thing, that is capable, like wax, of any impression, as its enemies may misrepresent it. There are many instances of predictions free from figurative expressions, precise, determinate, clear; relating to distant times from the delivery of them. In others, the figures are explained, and by that means the sense is uniform and plain. If indeed the application of Prophecy can be to *different* events, this would destroy its force and use: but let those who contend for such a wild and unsettled application, remove the apparent difficulty; or rather let them shew what grounds they have



have for such a needless and hurtful confession.

I would not be thought by what I have said, to despise any one argument that may help to prove or to defend the sacred writings. Nor is it my design to enter into the explication of all scripture Prophecies; but only to lay down such general rules, as will be found of use in a matter of this consequence. And as different arguments affect and convince different people, I have chose to prosecute this from Prophecy, which I take to be a certain irrefragable evidence of a divine revelation, and such as will stand the strictest trial and examination.

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### ERRATA.

PAGE 50. l. 2. dele *as*. *ibid.* l. 20. d. *that*.  
 p. 53. l. 25. for *their*, r. *these*. p. 54. l. 20,  
 21. for *such*, if *denied to be one*, r. *really one*.

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S E C T. I.

*Of the Nature of Prophecy.*

**B**Y the word Prophecy we generally mean the foretelling not any natural Phenomenon, or what may lie within the reach of human conjecture, but some future event unknowable by man. And in this sense only I now intend to speak of Prophecy.

We are naturally desirous of knowing what will happen. And in most ages and countries some Predictions have been generally received as true. Now such must be supposed to come either immediately from God, whose infinite Knowledge, including Prescience, few dispute; or from some inferior Being enabled, some way or other, by him to foretell what shall happen. But whether Prophecy immediately  
B proceeds

proceeds from God, or from any Inferior Being, it is certain it must come originally from him who is the Fountain of all Knowledge and every Perfection. And what comes from him must be perfect in it's kind, and must have it's completion in due time.

That the Almighty *foreknows*, few, as I have observed, if any, dispute.

And though we can have no perfect or adequate idea of Divine Prescience; we may have some conception of it from our own knowledge of what is past and present, and from our conjectures of what will happen.

He who is infinitely wise, and the Creator of all things, may well be supposed to know as perfectly what *will* be, as we know what *has been*, and what is. And *we* can conjecture many things that will come to pass. And this we do in proportion to our knowledge of the circumstances of things concerning which we form our conjectures. And I think we may fairly reason thus, As many guess in a surprising manner what *will* be, because they are better acquainted than others with the causes, both immediate and remote, which may probably produce such particular events; so he who cannot but know every cause, must necessarily know every effect.

But here I may perhaps be thought to assert that all things are produced in a necessary way, or absolutely determined by the Supreme Being: which is far from my opinion, not only because Experience shews us the contrary, but likewise upon this supposition there could be no room for the moral Attributes of God. We may easily perceive ourselves and others to be Free Agents, notwithstanding the pains  
that

that have been taken to prove all mankind no better than mere Machines. Nor do I think the atheistical notion of Fate, or the notion of absolute Predestination (which many, for what reason I cannot well guess, have been, and some are so fond of, and which amounts to near the same with the doctrine of Fate,) necessary to the supposition of Prophecy; or that it is absurd to suppose God to foreknow what Free Agents will intend, and do. This may seem somewhat strange to *our* confined and narrow Understandings: And we are apt to pronounce That impossible which is beyond human power. Yet I believe few or no thinking and reasoning men conclude that a thing cannot be done at all because *a man* cannot do it: It is possible at least, and therefore no absurdity to suppose Power and Knowledge abundantly superior to those of any *man* whatsoever. And we must grant that there actually are such, when we consider how we came by our own Power and Knowledge, and how we came into being.

Nor is it reasonable to reject a doctrine as false because we have not a perfect and adequate knowledge of it, or do not understand how it can be true. If so, all ignorant persons ought to look upon the learned as whimsical and brain-sick men, and pity them for entertaining so many unreasonable and ridiculous fancies, which *they*, who judge from pure unprejudiced nature, by no means comprehend; and which therefore must be false, if the reasoning from our ignorance or want of conception against the truth of any doctrine be just.



If indeed men would obtrude manifest absurdities, and downright contradictions upon us, and tell us these may be true for ought we know, and the reason why we think they cannot be true, is the want of a just conception of them; if men will say and unsay with one and the same breath, and yet persuade us they are talking not absurdly; we ought to reject what they say with a rational disdain, as the greatest imposition upon our Reason; because if such doctrines are true as contradict themselves, we can be no judges of Truth at all, and therefore ought not to trouble ourselves about it; nor can we be more certain that any thing is true, than we can be that That which contradicts itself, is false. But it is one thing to assert a downright contradiction, and another to assert what we have not a clear conception of. The former cannot but be false: The latter *may* be true, and therefore ought to be admitted upon proper evidence. And there are many such things the truth of which hardly any one disputes. Such is the nature of substances, the cohesion of matter, the powers of spiritual Beings, and the exertion of those powers. That such things really *are*, there seems little or no room to doubt. *How* they are, nobody pretends perfectly to understand. And as for those who would attribute sense, thought, and will to matter, they have more difficulties adhering to their doctrine, than are found in the supposition of spiritual beings distinct from matter, as might easily be shewn. But it is not to my purpose to enter upon such an argument.

But

But we are told that as the Will of Free Agents is in itself *uncertain*, till actually *determined*, it cannot be foreknown. This, however difficult to conceive by finite and narrow understandings, will hardly appear, upon examination, to conclude against Divine Prescience. And perhaps before we ought to make such a conclusion we should have a clear and adequate idea of Divine Prescience, which no human creature pretends to have.

If indeed the *certainty* of an event inferred the *necessity* of it, it would be impossible to foreknow the will of a free agent. But it must be allowed that *certainty* does not imply *necessity*, by all who will not affirm that what *is* could not have been otherwise than it is. I own that what *is*, is *certain*: Yet it does not follow that it was *necessary*, it being the effect of a voluntary cause or agent. Though it was certain from all Eternity that I could not have been at a different place, and in different company, from the present; or that I could not but have done many things which I have done, yet it does not follow, that I was under any necessity. And those that would assert that I was under such necessity can give no tolerable account of their opinion, but labour under insuperable difficulties. There seems at the first view a wide difference between what I have done voluntarily, and what I cannot but conceive to be; between *e. g.* every action of a rational being and space and duration; though the former, when done, is as necessary as the latter. Yet few or none will put them  
upon

upon the same bottom, and say there is just the same necessity for them \*.

And this, I think, may serve to illustrate the possibility of foreknowing what a free agent will do, without the least diminution to the doctrine of natural liberty. For whatever certainty there is, or knowledge of voluntary actions, it proceeds entirely from the  
Know-

\* When we think of respiration, the circulation of the blood, or the involuntary shaking caused by the Palsie, can we believe any of these to be of the same nature with a voluntary motion, or what is so called? He that does not see the difference between the former and the latter, should be indulged in absurdity, and permitted to say what he pleases in every controversy. And if there be any kind of difference between my going to this or that place of my own accord (if I may be allowed a common expression,) or the shaking of my head or hand with intention, and being shaken with the Palsie; what pretence is there for the *necessity* of human actions? And what absurdities are they not capable of asserting that maintain it? And till it be shewn that these things mentioned are exactly of the same nature, I shall think I have a right to assert that our actions are not *necessary*. If these things are of the same nature, they are all equally *necessary*. For *necessity* cannot admit of degrees; and it is absurd to say in a strict philosophical sense, This is more, and that less *necessary*. But it appears that the things mentioned are far from being equally *necessary*: and therefore I conclude that some of them are not *necessary* at all. Nor can I think these instances of any less force than downright demonstration: and freely give every one his choice of saying they are all exactly of the same nature, or acknowledging a difference between some of these and others, and then affirming them to be equally *necessary*, or, if you please, *necessary* at all. Let a man affirm which he will; and then view his affirmation in the most favourable light he can. And I think I need give him no further trouble upon this head. But then what shall we do for the scheme of the fatalists? I believe it is at an end without a remedy by this one argument; and must necessarily expire unless better supported than it has been. And let any one judge what credit the revivers of it are likely to gain thereby.



Knowledge of causes; and not from any fate, which is a word conveying no determinate idea. God foreknows this or that action because a creature *will* do it: nor does the creature will or act because God foreknows what it will do. And if we grant that he foreknows all things (as surely he must if it be possible, since he has all possible perfection in himself;) we must allow that there can be no future event but what, if he pleases, he may reveal before it shall happen, unless we are disposed to deny him the Power of revealing any thing at all, which I think no one ever did.

And when we find events answering exactly to Predictions, beyond the possibility of human conjectures, there is what I may call a clear demonstration of a Revelation from Heaven, unless you suppose some creature capable of the perfect Foreknowledge expressed in such Predictions. But, supposing a creature capable of such Foreknowledge, if these Predictions are delivered in the Name of the Supreme Being, we can have no just reason to doubt their coming from him; and therefore that we may safely conclude those Prophecies to be of Divine Original that are delivered in the Name of God, and most punctually verified beyond what any human creature could guess.

And this is an Evidence of a Divine Revelation which is increased by length of time, and strengthened by that which abates the force of other Evidences.

The longer a Prophecy is delivered before the Accomplishment of it, the more clearly  
and

and plainly it appears to be a true one, to all such as see its completion.

And from what I have said I think I may fairly infer what follows in the next Section, namely that

## S E C T. II.

*It is not absurd to suppose such a thing as true Prophecy.*

**I**F it be allowed that there is an All-wise, as well as Omnipotent Being, who foreknows all things, or any thing; it must be granted that it is possible for this Being to reveal his Foreknowledge some way or other. And that there is such a Being none but Atheists will deny. All Prophecy therefore should not be treated as being of course a cheat and abuse of mankind; as the invention of artful men, or the dreams and fancies of weak-brained Enthusiasts.

I think I have said enough concerning God's Foreknowledge of what free agents will do: which is the greatest difficulty concerning his Prescience. And if it be granted that he foreknows, and likewise can reveal what he foreknows; it follows that there may be such a thing as *Prophecy* coming from him, and such a person as a true Prophet.

Nor is it any just objection to this assertion that there have been, or are, many impostors under the character of Prophets. For if it is not just to conclude that there is no honest or good man in the world, because some pretend to be both who are neither, or that there

is no such thing as skill in this or that art, or language, because some pretend to skill in these that have it; not or that there is no real diamond in the world because there are many fictitious jewels; it must be unreasonable to despise and ridicule every thing called *Prophecy*, and every person called a *Prophet*, only because there are false prophecies and false prophets. And if so, it is easy to judge of the wisdom of many in our own age, who pretend to be Philosophers and Reasoners, and yet pretend that there can be no such thing as true Prophecy. There are indeed those, who treat Prophecy as if they thought it all fallacy and delusion, and that there could be no such thing as true Prophecy; as if the Almighty was ignorant of future events, or unable to discover them to men. But if it be granted that God knows, and can reveal what will be, there may, as I have observed, be such a thing as true Prophecy.

Nor can we think it any way improbable that God should, upon certain Occasions, and for certain Ends, discover future events to men, when we consider his infinite Goodness, and the great Advantages which may be consequent upon some such Discoveries.

We need not doubt that he, who could have no reason for creating any thing but the communication of his Goodness in making creatures happy, and who has made many beings capable of knowing his wonderful Perfections and Works in some measure, and of receiving information of future events, will discover some of these to such beings, when the discovery of them may be of great Benefit and Advantage to them: as a tender father readily gives his



son such things as he thinks will be most beneficial to him. All Prophecy therefore should not, as I said, be ridiculed as a fancy, or exploded as a cheat. And he must be a very weak and injudicious person who treats it in the one or the other manner, since it is neither impossible nor improbable that some such thing may come from the Almighty.

But how then are we to judge of Prophecy? Must we believe every idle pretender to Divine Inspiration? If so, we shall have little to do but to obey hypocrites and enthusiasts. But how we are to judge or act in this case, is the great question, but I hope not very difficult to be answered. And as it is of great moment to have it clearly answered, I shall endeavour to do it in the next Section.

### S E C T. III.

*Marks by which true and false Prophets, or Prophecies, may be distinguished.*

**I**T will be of little advantage to us to have Prophecies from Heaven, if we cannot distinguish them from cheats and delusions, or the mere fancies and whims of enthusiasts; or if we are liable to be imposed upon by some of the latter, and to embrace them instead of the former, whatever care we may take to be rightly informed.

We may therefore reasonably judge that if God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, has given us *true Prophecy*, he has afforded us some proper means of knowing it to be such, and of escaping impositions under the cover of true Prophecies. I shall therefore lay down  
some

some particular marks of distinction between true and false Prophecy, which if we well observe, we shall hardly be deceived by any pretence of Prophecy offered to us as from Divine Authority.

1. It may be convenient to consider the *End* proposed to be answered by any Prophecy we examine, and the Tendency of it.

If that *End* be truly worthy of the Almighty, as tending to the Benefit of mankind or any considerable number of men; it is so far well recommended to us. But if no good End can be answered by it; it cannot come from a Being infinitely wise and good.

I would not pronounce a Prophecy true, and of Divine original, only from the good moral tendency of it. For enthusiasts may deliver prophecies which may, if supposed true, have good moral uses. And perhaps vanity itself may induce some to take the character of Prophets upon themselves, and deliver such predictions as may resemble as much as possible what may be supposed to come from God.

But the good tendency of a prediction is certainly one requisite quality in order to admit external evidence of it's coming from God; as, on the other hand, the want of this, and especially the contrary to it, will plainly shew that a prediction is not of Divine original.

If the Power and Providence, the Wisdom and Goodness of God, are so set forth in a Prophecy, as to have the happiest Effects upon the minds of those that carefully consider it; it is not unlikely that it comes from him who always wills the Good and Welfare of his creatures, and would have us think and

act in the best manner. But if, on the contrary no good use can be made of a particular prediction, or if it tends to lessen our Ideas of the Supreme Being, or any way to vitiate and corrupt our minds; we may be sure it cannot proceed from the all-perfect Being. A

2d Mark by which we may judge of a Prophecy, is the character of him that delivers it.

If he be a serious and sedate, a wise and good man; he cannot intend to deceive. But if he is artful and subtil, vicious in his morals, or weak and unsettled in his understanding; he may fairly be suspected of designing to impose upon others, or being deceived himself, till he gives good proof to the contrary.

I will not deny that God may, for good Ends, inspire weak, or even bad men, with the Spirit of Prophecy. But it seems most likely in general that those employed in so important and extraordinary an affair should be men of calm heads and honest minds. And no doubt whenever any others are so employed by the Almighty, he gives them sufficient Credentials, such as, when fairly examined, shew them to be true Prophets.

I am far from thinking with the Jews that Prophecy *never resides but upon a wise, a strong, and a rich man*\*. God may shew his Power and Wisdom eminently in a person of the lowest natural abilities, education, and circumstances. Nor is any great share of understanding and learning so requisite a qualification of a Prophet as a calm undisturbed mind, not shattered or discomposed by mere fancies and imagina-

\* *Whitby* upon 1 Cor i. 26.



imaginations ; which perhaps as often at least fall to the share of a man of low parts and apprehension, as one of more keen and ready abilities of mind.

Weak and ignorant men may indeed, by the artifice of others, or by their own particular prejudices, be worked up into surprising degrees of enthusiasm ; but perhaps are less able to run into it themselves than men of stronger parts and superior abilities. A lively imagination, stored with variety of incoherent ideas, may make almost any man an enthusiast. And we generally find a leader of such persons neither very ignorant, nor a man of sound judgment.

3. Another Rule by which we may help to distinguish true from false Prophecy, I think, may be, to observe the circumstances attending the delivery of a prophecy.

If it be delivered in a rational and unaffected manner, it is the more likely to come from him who can teach us nothing but what is rational and unaffected. But if it be attended with violent and surprising motions and agitations, I think we may fairly suspect the Truth of it upon that account, till some good rational evidence appears in it's favour. For I cannot see what these have to do with Truth or useful Instructions \*

It is not my business here to determine whether such kinds of enthusiasm as produce monstrous distortions of the face and body, and are attended with other circumstances calculated rather to amuse and frighten, than instruct

\* I do not look upon some extraordinary, but yet significant things done by some of the Prophets of the Old Testament, as objections to this observation.

struct those that observe them; I say, it is not my business to determine whether such kinds of enthusiasm proceed from mere art, or the strength of fancy, (which is known to have surprising effects,) or some evil spirit; or sometimes from one, and sometimes from another of these. There have been learned men who have attributed them to each. But let them have what original they will, when they are attended with such extravagant circumstances, they do not seem to come from him who does nothing but for some good and gracious End.

If men are, or pretend to be so moved by the Spirit of Prophecy that they cannot forbear speaking at some particular times, and cannot prophesy at others, (which was the case of the ancient Greek prophets\*;) we have, I think, reason to conclude from thence rather that they are not, than that they are inspired by the Almighty. For I know no just reason that can be given for such a necessity of speaking, in order to confirm the authority of a Prophet, or a Prophecy. We may have Evidences enough of the Truth of Prophecy without this: and what good end this can answer is not easy to say. It does not seem consistent with infinite Wisdom thus to impell a rational being, unless it be needful, and productive of some great Good, which is not the case here. Accordingly the ancient Christians observed this as a Mark of distinction between true and false prophets, that the former could speak or be silent when they pleased; but the latter could not be silent

\* *Oecumenius* and *Theophylact* in *Whitby* upon 1 Cor. xiv. 32.

silent when they were inspired; this was at least their pretence. And it was asserted in the case of the *Montanists*, that they could shew no truly inspired Prophet of the Old or New Testament who was so moved that he could not be silent \*; and concluded that theirs were false prophets because they had an ungoverned impetus. And thus *Oecumenius* and *Theophylact* interpret this sentence 1 Cor. xiv. 32. *The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* †. That is, say they, They can speak or be silent as they will; and are not, like the Heathen Prophets, irresistibly moved to speak when they are inspired.

4. If a man should do some great and wonderful things, plainly exceeding human power, and at the same time deliver a prophecy no way exceptionable, as containing any absurdity or immorality; I think we ought to receive that prophecy as coming from God, from whom, no doubt, the Power of doing such wonders proceeds. And I think it would be absurd, and a great derogation from his Wisdom and Goodness, to say he would bestow such Power upon any creature to support what is false, or any thing but what is not only true, but of great Moment and Importance.

There have been many disputes about miracles, both with regard to their nature and use: which I think I need not go through at present. It is enough for me to observe that great and uncommon things done, which it is certain no human power can effect, (and these I call Miracles,) such as altering the natural properties of things, walking upon the surface

\* *Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. 5. c. 17. Whitby ibid. † ibid.*



surface of water, or raising the dead to life ; such things done, I say, in confirmation of a Prophecy, as they certainly shew Divine Power, so they certainly shew the Divine Appointment of that Prophecy.

It would be unphilosophical to say such things are impossible. For if they imply no contradiction, they may be done by the omnipotent Being.

If you say they are contradictions to Nature, you are to consider what Nature is, and whether any thing more can be meant by it than a particular state of things, and common causes and effects. If this be the sense of the word, let it be considered, that he who made all things, and is the source of all Power, can as easily alter the present, or any state, or course of things, as he could put them into such a state or course. And it is hard to say that infinite Wisdom and Goodness can never find it fit and reasonable to do so, for the good and benefit of some one or more beings. And if it should at any time be so, it seems plainly to follow that these Perfections of the Creator would engage him to alter some part or other of his creation for the same reason for which he created any thing at all, namely the Communication of his Goodness.

We are not indeed to expect Miracles whenever we may fancy we need them ; or to answer every purpose we may be inclined to believe well worthy of them. But when great Ends can be answered by them ; when great and extensive Good may follow from them ; it is most reasonable to think they will be done by the Power and Appointment of

of the Almighty, who best knows when there is real, and when there is only imaginary need of them; when they will have the greatest and happiest effects, and when they will not; whatever short-sighted *men* may think of them, or the need there may be of them.

And if one professing himself a Prophet should do many evident and remarkable Miracles; especially if he should do such openly and before many witnesses; it must surely be some very strong objection, amounting to little, if any thing less than Demonstration, that ought to outweigh such an evidence as this of his being a true Prophet, or really commissioned by God.

Nor is there any manner of force in that weak and trite objection of proving in a circle doctrines by miracles, and miracles by doctrines. For a miracle is not proved to be a miracle by any doctrine or prophecy, but it is what it is, independent of any doctrine whatever. Nor do I make use of miracles as the *only* proof of the truth of a prophecy, or of its being divine; but in case a miracle be done, by the same person that utters a prophecy, the credibility of the prophecy is such, as demands our assent, if we have not demonstration against it.

But let us attend to this most manifest distinction between the giving a thing as a proof; and only supposing it capable of being proved\*. I do not, I say, offer to prove a miracle by a doctrine or prophecy; but only suppose the prophecy capable of being proved, as containing neither absurdity nor

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\* Dr. Clarke's Evid. of Nat. and Rev. Relig. Prop. 14.

immorality, and then proved by one or more miracles to come from God.

It may be, and has been said, that *evil spirits* may do miracles in confirmation of false and wicked doctrines. I shall not dispute their power of doing miracles, that is, of doing things beyond human power. But the point is to prove, that they ever did in fact such miracles. And if they never did, that we ever heard of, it is an idle dispute about imaginary powers, that we know nothing of.

But I must own that this evidence of miracles is much stronger to those that either see them themselves, or lived near the time when they are done, than to those that live in some distant age after they are done.

5. If a prophet foretells what actually comes to pass; and in such circumstances that it is very unlikely at least that he should make a just conjecture of the event, especially of several events, though he might have guessed at one, or perhaps a second; this is a good proof of his being a true prophet; and we may reasonably believe *him* with regard to what is future, whose former predictions have been proved true by correspondent events: supposing still no just objection to a prophecy as absurd or immoral.

This is no more than believing one we have known to have told the truth, and never have known to falsify: a thing every body allows to be most just and reasonable. And what could you think of him who should suspect such a one of a lie? It is judging from experience: one of the best and surest ways of judging. We have *found* such a one  
a true



a true Prophet ; and therefore dare pronounce him such, and believe him when he prophesies.

If a man foretells things which come to pass in a little time, it is at least a good presumption of his being a true prophet. And the more he foretells of these, the stronger evidence there is of his being such ; and it is the more likely still that his future predictions should be verified.

And some events foretold soon before they happen may be of such a nature as not to admit of any probable conjecture beforehand ; as there are many that fall out beyond all expectation. Easy instances may be given of such events, and we often meet with them.

If a thing be foretold some ages before it happened, and it came punctually to pass ; it is most evident that he who foretold it was a true Prophet, and no impostor. For, though some very discerning persons, who know the springs of action in particular societies, may give very near guesses what will be done in some short time, supposing persons and things to go on as they do at present ; yet it is impossible to give the least probable conjecture what will be some ages hence : and therefore no one by mere human knowledge can foretell it.

We can hardly be deceived by false Prophecy, or reject what is true and of divine original, if we carefully observe the foregoing rules, and judge by them : if we consider the end proposed by a Prophecy, and the tendency of it ; the character of him who delivers it ; the circumstances attending the delivery of it ; what miracles are wrought in

confirmation of his mission; and whether any thing foretold has punctually come to pass, or not, or what particular things, at what distance of time, and how circumstanced. I believe every impartial man will allow these particulars to be sufficient to determine the truth or falsity of any Prophecy whatsoever.

I do not say you ought to reject every Prophecy as false that has not all these marks. *Some* of them may be sufficient to shew the truth of a Prophecy. But where they all meet it would be very unfair to question the truth of what is attested by them.

#### S E C T. IV.

##### *How to judge of obscure Prophecies.*

**S**OME are very much offended at the obscurity of many Prophecies: others fond of representing Prophecies more obscure than they really are.

There are several reasons for the obscurity of Prophecies which by no means diminish their authority.

1. Most things are obscure till observed with attention. So that we ought to consider whether the obscurity we complain of be in the thing we are speaking of, or in our own minds.

Our ideas are often confused and puzzled at the first view of a thing. And indolent persons will not take the pains to examine things, and therefore do not understand them.

And as ignorant men would have the reputation of knowing, as well as those that really

really deserve it; their common shift in order to hide their ignorance as well as they can, and to be free from the disgrace of it, is to complain of the difficulty and uncertainty of what others understand, though they themselves do not: and this we find done with regard to almost every subject of our enquiry. Now it is impossible for these persons to know whether there be any great difficulty or uncertainty, in a thing they will not study; and which is not so difficult to be understood as many think; since the obscurity of it is often owing to the want of looking carefully into it.

2. It must be supposed that ancient writings, whether Prophecies or things of another nature, will have their difficulties; and that it will be necessary to obtain some previous knowledge in order to understand them.

The circumstances of time and place, the modes of speaking, and genius of the language in which they are writ, must be well considered by such as would know their meaning. And if a man takes pains in the perusal of them without the knowledge of these things (as I believe many do,) his labour must necessarily be lost, and he must get nothing better than most confused and incoherent ideas by his study of them.

Something of this nature appears both in the discourse and writings of many. And when this happens, the learned and judicious easily see where the fault lies, whilst others are perhaps complaining of the obscurity and difficulty of what many puzzle themselves about, without qualifying themselves to understand it.

If



If then an ancient Prophecy be said to be obscure, he that makes this complaint may be fairly asked whether or no he has furnished himself with the previous knowledge necessary to make a fair judgment of it. If not, it is certain his complaint is at random, and ill-grounded, or at least taken upon trust, a very precarious way of *judging*, if it may be called *judging* at all. As a modest man who has a strict regard for truth will say no further of what he hears from uncertain information than that he hears so and so, and does not pretend to insist upon the truth of what he thus mentions ; so I do not see what right any one has to say more of the truth of an assertion, for which he has no better evidence than the mere opinion of others, whoever they are, than that he is *told* it is true, or such and such persons *have thought*, or *do think* so. But men do not care to discover their ignorance ; and had much rather talk at a venture, without being able to judge of what they are talking of.

3. The circumstances of some Prophecies may make them obscure.

They may be such as cannot be clearly understood till they are accomplished, when they may be made plain and evident by known facts.

This may be well supposed of such Prophecies as relate to things at a great distance of time, which perhaps cannot be so described as to be totally understood till they actually take place.

Some things indeed may be understood as well at a distance of time before they happen as after they happen : such as the great prosperity

city or total destruction of cities or nations: others may be of such things as require Ideas which our words cannot convey, in order fully to understand them; as we cannot have a clear and adequate idea of a future state from the best and most exact description alone. So likewise, many facts and events may be such as the most accurate and piercing human judgment cannot understand by the plainest verbal descriptions of them. We need not wonder therefore if we are at a loss for the meaning of Prophecies that point out things to happen in a future distant age, the manners, customs, and many particular circumstances of which we must be entirely ignorant of.

And the like may easily happen with regard to ancient Prophecies relating to things which have long ago taken place, and which, for want of an exact account of them, we may have little or no idea of.

Nor can we judge at all from the events to which such Prophecies relate, whether they are true or false, or whether they have been fulfilled or not, without knowing those events. It is easy therefore for some ignorant, but conceited persons to call such a Prophecy a false one, or say it has no meaning at all, only because they know nothing of it. And this, I believe, is pretty frequently done; as many reject doctrines they are no judges of for that very reason, which doctrines they would readily have embraced if they had understood them and the evidence appearing in their favour. But as some complain of the obscurity and uncertainty of what they do not understand; others pronounce every thing  
false

false or absurd that goes beyond their little share of knowledge.

It is allowed by all, that none talk more ridiculously than conceited sciolists; and that the most ignorant talk much more to the purpose than such as have just knowledge enough to think absurdly. These shew their folly equally in receiving and rejecting doctrines, in believing and disbelieving.

As for things we do not understand, and of the truth or falsity of which we know little, or have no evidence, we certainly ought to be in perfect suspense about them, or at most to give assent or dissent according to the small evidence we have of their truth or falsity. So that the bare obscurity of a Prophecy will not prove it a false one.

But I may be asked whether I can have any reason to believe a very obscure Prophecy true; and of what use any thing can be to me which I do not understand.

Now it is not difficult to shew that a Prophecy not understood may have good evidence for the truth of it.

If he that delivers it has delivered others plainly proved to be true; if he has done eminent miracles, and there be no just reason to suspect his integrity; it is very likely his Prophecy is a true one.

But if it be, it may be asked of what use it can be, since it is not understood. And if it is of no use, we cannot reasonably believe the Almighty would appoint it to be delivered, according to the first mark I laid down to distinguish true from false Prophecy.

But



But my supposition is not that a Prophecy should *never* be understood: but that there may be some time in which it cannot be understood. And this may easily be, as already observed, from the particular circumstances of it. And I shall readily own, that it is of no use, whilst it is not at all understood. But since it may have been understood formerly, or may be understood in time to come, tho' neither I nor any one else may understand it at present; I ought not to conclude it false, or totally useless, because it is now unintelligible, any more than I have a right to pronounce a language which neither I nor others with whom I live understand, mere jargon or senseless characters.

So that we have a plain way of judging of obscure, and even at present unintelligible Prophecies (whatever they are;) namely, to consider from whence their obscurity proceeds, and, if we would understand them, to make ourselves masters, if possible, of that kind of knowledge which is necessary to the understanding of them; and after all not to conclude them false from their mere obscurity, but either to suspend our judgment about them, or believe them true or false according to the evidence that appears for or against them.

But since some have been ready to represent all Prophecy as no better than Conjecture; I think it may be of use to consider the manifest difference between the one and the other.

## E N D O F THE FIRST S E C T.

## S E C T. V.

*The Difference between Prophecy and Conjecture.*

**T**HIS will plainly appear from what has been already observed; especially if we consider the nature of conjecturing.

He that is well acquainted with particular things and their circumstances, is often enabled to give a shrewd guess at what will happen for some time with relation to those things: of which we have many and frequent instances. And our own experience shews us how such conjectures are formed.

We can take a view of the present state and condition of things, their causes and effects, and the particular workings of the former, in producing the latter: And the better we are acquainted with these, the more exactly we know their present state; and the better we are able to judge what their condition will be. If they have long continued in a particular course, we have reason to believe they will remain some time longer in it, when we can fairly account for what we observe at present; as we conclude a large river, which has kept its current for some ages will not soon run dry, or forsake its channel.

And as for the several variations we perceive in the condition and circumstances of things, we may judge from them when we are acquainted with their causes, what alterations will be for some time in the things we have examined with exactness, only from this plain rule of judging, that the same cause must ever have the same effects. But even this rule may easily

easily deceive us, or rather we may easily be deceived, whilst we falsely think we form our judgment according to it, for want of observing with sufficient exactness the several particular operations and circumstances of the things concerning which we make our conjectures. And thus sometimes a very discerning Person is strangely disappointed in his opinion of what will happen, and finds the very contrary events to those he expected. This cannot be but from the ignorance of some cause or operation productive of what really happens; and the depending upon such circumstances as the conjecturer has observed, which perhaps, if there were no other causes but what he sees, must necessarily be follow'd by the expected events.

The truth is, we know some, and often many operations tending to particular effects. But at the same time there are many latent causes which we cannot at all guess at, many entirely unknown even when we plainly perceive their effects. The more there are of these, the less exactly we form our conjectures; and the fewer there are, the nearer we approach towards a certain prediction.

And this consideration may shew us at once the difference between Prophecy and Conjecture. The great Author of the former (as already observ'd) cannot but be acquainted with *all* causes and effects, as well those that *will be* as those that *are*, and those that *have been*; and therefore must necessarily know all future events; and can exactly foretel them; and this is what I call true Prophecy: whereas conjecture is nothing more than an imperfect judgment concerning things to come, form'd



from an imperfect knowledge of things present.

But what will all that has been said avail, or what advantage can be proposed from it, if Prophecy is not to be *understood*, as many pretend? To obviate this difficulty, I shall lay down some rules in the next Section for the interpretation of Prophecy.

## S E C T. VI.

### *Rules for understanding Prophecy.*

**I**F Men are any way prejudiced against a thing, they are glad of every objection they can find or invent; and if they like a doctrine, they are as desirous of having it proved true, just, and good, and recommended in the best manner possible. On the other hand, if they have conceived an aversion to any particular doctrine, they love to represent it as false or trifling, hurtful or ridiculous; to say any thing they can, with the appearance of reason, to discredit it: their arguments and wit join forces against it, to drive it from the esteem of mankind.

It is with Prophecy as it is with other things. Some are so fond of it, that they easily impose upon themselves, and may likewise be easily imposed upon by others, in cases of this nature.

They are already prepared to receive any thing as a true Prophecy that suits their own sentiments and turn of mind. Nor would they scruple to give up some favourite tenets, which they could not spare upon another occasion,

caſion, to a Prophecy that ſhould ſound pompous and wonderful.

To ſuch perſons the obſcurity of a prophecy is rather a recommendation than an objection. For they are not fond of what is intelligible ; and are afraid that plain and undisguiſed truths (however uſeful) are below the dignity of Divine Revelation. Nor are they ever better pleaſed than when they are ſaying or hearing what they do not underſtand.

One poſſeſſed of this turn of mind cannot be ſuppoſed to underſtand Prophecy. For he would ſooner obſcure what is plain, than remove any difficulty relating to it.

Some are not indeed ſo fond of obſcurities ; but have a particular ſcheme of doctrines by which moſt or all Prophecy is, according to them, to be interpreted.

Some love allegories ; others nice diſtinctions. Many are fond of one ſyſtem ; and many of another. And ſome are beſt pleaſed with ſyſtems of their own making.

And as men are diſpoſed one or another of theſe ways ; or whatever particular turn they take which may influence their judgment with regard to Prophecy ; they will certainly ſhew that turn in what they will ſay about it.

And they that do not like the pains of enquiring into it, and likewise thoſe that are otherwiſe prejudiced againſt it, will be glad of the pretence of obſcurity, or any thing elſe to neglect or deſpiſe it ; eſpecially if they are conceited, and affect the character of knowing perſons, without taking the neceſſary pains to be really ſuch.

When theſe things are conſider'd, the  
1ſt Rule,

1st Rule, naturally occurring for the understanding of Prophecy, and indeed every thing we would be acquainted with, is to be free from prejudice. For whatever we have of it, more or less, in our minds, must hinder us in proportion from having a clear sense of truth.

The doctrines we are prejudiced in favour of may be true as well as false. But when we are prejudiced, every man of sense must know that we do not receive them from their proper evidence.

There is a wide difference between one that knows or believes the truth of a doctrine by its proper evidence, and one that asserts or believes the same for some reason that by no means amounts to a proof of it.

We have instances of both sorts of persons : But every body knows the latter are much more numerous than the former. And this is a reason why we should guard as much as possible against all prejudice, as we love truth, and would be rightly informed, and would not be led blindfold into error, or have the truth itself of little use to us for want of a right perception of it.

If the prejudiced man *happens* to be in the right, it is but a lucky hit. If he is zealous for truth (as he is commonly zealous, and even furious, for something, tho' it often happens that he knows not what ; ) I say, if he is zealous for the truth, he may fairly be said to have an unreasonable zeal, and to give an unreasonable assent. Nor can it be any greater merit or virtue in him to be in the right than in the wrong. For whatever there is of this kind in one that assents to any doctrine, must  
proceed



proceed from care and a rational enquiry. Nothing merely accidental can make us either commendable or culpable. We may indeed be justly blamed for our negligence ; and therefore deservedly suffer the bad consequences of our ignorance, or error, when that is owing to the want of due attention and application of mind. But this negligence is just the same, and equally faulty, whether a man *happens* to believe right or wrong ; whether he gives an implicit assent, without sufficient examination, to a true or a false doctrine. And if this was fairly consider'd, we should know the only fault of *unbelievers*, and know at the same time that careless implicit *believers* are equally guilty with them. And the manifest reason why Belief is so much insisted upon in Scripture, is the great moment and importance of the doctrines deliver'd in it, as appears from all those texts of Scripture (and numerous they are) which require Belief in order to practice.

We *are* therefore to judge rationally, according to our ability and means of information, of Prophecy, and every thing else we would judge of at all ; and especially where Religion is concerned : and guard against prejudice in the best manner we can.

We should be very cautious of preconceived opinions that may any way prevent or hinder our right judgment, especially in matters of moment, and where our welfare is greatly concerned ; that we may not be hindered from receiving the several advantages consequent upon judging well, nor suffer the evils a wrong judgment may bring upon us. He must be a stranger to right reason, human nature, and the affairs of life, who is not aware of many  
and

and various benefits arising from a just sense of things, and of variety of evils necessarily following a wrong one. And whoever believes there is any such thing as true Religion, must acknowledge that it highly concerns us to be acquainted with it, if possible; and that great mischiefs may be consequent upon some mistakes relating to it. Can we then be too cautious of admitting or retaining any kind of prejudice in things that concern us in the highest degree; as matters of Religion certainly do?

I would not insinuate that our future salvation is concerned in understanding every true Prophecy we read. But it certainly misbecomes us, and that greatly, to pass a rash judgment upon any thing, and especially what we ourselves acknowledge to be sacred, and to come from the Almighty. And I need not use many words to shew that great mischiefs may be, and have been consequent upon misunderstanding Prophecies.

Nothing can be so good, so useful, so sacred, but that an abuse of it may be greatly detrimental. Every one therefore should examine Prophecy with a fair unprejudiced mind: And then if he is otherwise qualified to understand it, he is very likely to succeed in his enquiries concerning it, because the greatest obstacle to his success is removed. Nor do I doubt that Prophecy, as well as other things, would be much better understood, if men would thus enquire into the meaning of it.

2. As I have before hinted, we must observe the circumstances of time and place, the modes of speaking when and where, this or that Prophecy was delivered, the genius of the language

guage in which it was given, and the particular stile of the Prophet, beside the general prophetick stile, if there be any such, as, I think, all agree there is, who pretend to have any knowledge of Scripture Prophecy.

These things must be well considered by one that would understand any thing of this kind; for it seems most evident, that a mistake in any of these things may hinder us from discovering the meaning of a Prophecy.

But I may be asked perhaps whether no body should pretend to know any thing of Scripture Prophecy who does not understand *Greek* and *Hebrew*, and is not nicely acquainted with the history of the times when such Prophecies were delivered. This, I believe, no wise man will assert. For, though these things should be understood in order to know the meaning of scripture Prophecy; when once they are sufficiently known for this end, they may be so far explained to the ignorant as to give them a sense of what depends upon the knowledge of them. Something of this nature is done continually. We have difficulties both, in language and history happily explained by the learned.

Yet every one must prefer the immediate and primary, to the secondary knowledge of these things, as it gives us clearer conceptions of what depends upon them.

And though we may be at a loss for some circumstances of antiquity we could wish to know; we may sometimes find out such as may, in some measure at least, answer the end of our enquiry. Otherwise we should be greater sufferers than we are by the loss of ancient writings.

F

When



When we are well acquainted with the things I am now speaking of, we may find it much easier to understand a Prophecy, than when we have but a distant and imperfect knowledge of them. We are therefore to look into them as carefully as we can, in order to understand such predictions as depend upon them.

Some Prophecies may be plain and easy at any time, and in any language: such as that concerning *Josiah*, 1 Kings xiii. 2. and that concerning *Cyrus*, Isaiah xlv. 28. Others may be so explained by events as to leave no room to the impartial observer to doubt of their meaning. But many Prophecies, as well as other writings, cannot be understood without the previous knowledge of particular customs and circumstances of the time when, and place where, they were delivered, as will easily appear from considering the predictions both of the old and new testament.

3. We should know the occasion of a Prophecy, in order to know its meaning, where there is any difficulty in it.

We find it a needful help to the understanding of any writing whatsoever that is not very plain, and easy to be understood, to know the occasion of its being writ. This shews, in great measure the intention of the writer, and removes many difficulties which may occur upon the first perusal of it, to one unacquainted with the design of the author, and what gave occasion to his work. And without this it is impossible to understand many writings which are very easily understood when this is known. And this causes many difficulties in ancient books, and produces

duces many controversies amongst the learned, who do not pretend to understand the books they read without guessing at least at the design of the writers of them, and what gave immediate occasion to their being wrote.

This naturally leads me to a 4th rule, namely, to make use of one Prophecy for the explanation of another, when we find two or more relating to one event: of which we may find many instances both in the old and new Testament.

One such Prophecy may be much plainer than another for various reasons. We may be better acquainted with the several circumstances of it before mentioned, needful to be known in order to discover it's meaning. It may be delivered in clearer and easier terms, and explained by some events already come to pass, foretold in it, which are not foretold in the other, and we may have much better helps in discovering its meaning. Besides, it is hardly possible for two or three discourses of any kind upon the same subject, that have any difficulty, and at the same time any meaning in them, to be so formed as not to explain one another. Even the variety of expression in this case is a great help to the understanding of them.

5. Particular notice must be taken of the stile and manner of writing of the Prophet whose Prophecy we are reading.

This is allowed to be necessary to the understanding of any book whatsoever that has it's difficulties; especially ancient books. Nor does a learned man pretend to understand any such, except the Bible, without it. And if this was duly observed in reading that, it

would be much better understood than it is. And if it had been always observed, I believe many volumes of controversy which have greatly darkened the sense of scripture, and infested the Christian world, would never have appeared; especially if the former rules had been punctually regarded, which are as applicable to the study of other parts of scripture, as to that of the Prophecies it contains.

There is something peculiar in the writing and speaking of every one. And this often causes obscurity to those who are unacquainted with the manner of writing, or speaking, used by a particular person. And till we are somewhat used to this, it is apt to puzzle us.

And as we cannot so easily discover the peculiar manner of an ancient, as that of a modern writer; it is absurd presumption to pronounce rashly concerning his meaning. And as there are difficulties peculiar to Prophecy; it is still more absurd to pretend to understand an ancient Prediction without care, and attention to the several needful rules in order to know the meaning of it. The

6th and last of which I shall lay down, shall be the exact observation of events supposed to be foretold.

These may explain a Prophecy we could not otherwise understand. And when they are well known, we may easily judge whether they are really foretold in such a particular Prophecy or not. And when we find that some events which have happened were foretold in this or that Prophecy, we may the better understand other things contained in it.

This



This rule has been excellently applied by several learned men of our own and other nations ; particularly by Sir *Isaac Newton* and Mr. *Mede* : but by none better than by Dr. *Sykes*, in his *Connexion of Natural and Revealed Religion*. And I am fully persuaded that he who carefully considers what these men (not to mention many others) have writ upon the Prophecies of the Old and New Testament will understand some that are almost given over as unintelligible : and that they who will study Prophecy as they have done, will by no means lose their labour : and that many events, when fairly considered, will appear undeniably to have been foretold by the direction of the Almighty ; which I hope to shew beyond all reasonable contradiction in it's proper place. In the mean time I think it needful to obviate a common, though very frivolous objection to Prophecy and revealed Religion, grounded on The

## S E C T. VII.

*Different opinions concerning Prophecy :  
which is in truth no just objection to it.*

**I** May perhaps be told, that after all I have said, however plausible and reasonable it may appear, there is such a *variety of opinions*, even amongst the most learned, concerning Prophecy, that no one knows where to find the truth ; and if we are in the right it is with so much *uncertainty*, that the truth is likely to give but small, if any satisfaction.

This

This I might perhaps have seen, weak as it is, by way of objection to what I have now made public, set off in the best dress an objector could afford it, if I had not mentioned it myself. And if it shall come after all I have said, it is very welcome; for I dare say it will do Prophecy no manner of harm. For if it be good against that, it is against every thing else where it may take place. But I assure myself that no objector will allow it to be just against his own opinions, however strongly it may be urged against them.

But so it happens sometimes that the same weapon is called a lawful weapon in one man's hand, and an unlawful one in another's; the same argument a very good one on one side of a question, and very bad on the other.

Is there a truth so plain as not to have been disputed by some very learned men? or is there an absurdity so gross as not to have been asserted by such? And must we therefore, with some scepticks, say there is no such thing as truth or falsehood? Are not many things which are thought little less than self-evident by some, strenuously denied by many? And does this at all lessen the assent of the former?

This is a good instrument to awe weak minds; but of no force against one that *can*, and *dares*, reason. But it is used in religious matters, though laughed at in almost every thing else. And why it should have any more strength in these than in other things I am yet at a loss to know.

The truth is, the opinion of men learned or unlearned ought by no means to determine our assent or dissent, unless it is acknowledged to be an evidence for or against a particular

ticular doctrine. And I believe few reasoning men will allow it to be so, except upon the principles of church authority, which in matters of belief has nothing to plead for itself. The most you can say justly for the mere opinion of one or more is, that it is an evidence only for want of a better, but none at all when any other appears.

No matter therefore how many various or contrary opinions there are about Prophecy, or any thing else; or how learned or wise they are who deliver them; if I have plain, or sufficient evidence for my own. And this I may have, though contradicted by numbers even of wise and learned men. For such have their prejudices, and absurdities too, as well as others. And this I think all who are any thing acquainted with them or their writings will readily own. And it is what they are continually charging upon one another.

## S E C T. VIII.

*Some Prophecies of the old Testament proved to be true Prophecies, and delivered by the appointment of God.*

**I** Observed five marks of true Prophecy, Sect. III. And if some or all these are properly applied, I think I may affirm that we shall not be mistaken in judging of any particular Prophecy, whether it be delivered by divine appointment or not; and that where we are mistaken, it is entirely owing to our not observing or duly applying one or more of these. And if so, I believe it will



will not be difficult now to determine absolutely and clearly concerning most or all the Prophecies both of the old and new Testament, whether they are true and of divine original, or no ; whatever controversies there have been, or still are, about them, or however some learned men, instead of clearing, have puzzled the cause they have been engaged in.

And certain it is, that for want of some such method as this of examining Prophecy that many have laid it open to some of the objections at least that have appeared against it.

I begin with the Prophecy against *Tyre*, *Isai.* xxiii. most punctually delivered, and as punctually fulfilled. The very duration of its distress, and what should happen after it, are foretold, v. 15. where it is said, *Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, and, after the end of seventy years Tyre shall sing as an harlot ;* or, according to the *Hebrew* phrase set down in the margin, *It shall be unto Tyre as the song of an harlot.* She shall again live in a luxurious and wicked manner, and the return of her trade and merchandise is here compared to the practice of an enticing deluding harlot.

All that is said concerning *Tyre* in this chapter was, as I said, most punctually fulfilled. For *Tyre* was not taken before *Nebuchadnezzar* took it, and it was restored by the favour of the *Persian* monarchs some time after the return of the *Jews* from *Babylon*, in the days of *Darius Hystaspes*.

All this was foretold by *Isaiab* about one hundred twenty five years before it began to be accomplished. And therefore it was absolutely impossible for him to conjecture it.

And

And I would fain have some tolerable account how the Prophet came by the foreknowledge thus express'd, but by Divine Revelation.

The same things are foretold by *Jeremiah* \* and *Ezekiel* †, and now stand upon record \* *Jer. 27.*  
as lasting instances of true Prophecy. † *Ezek. 26.*

In *Isaiab*, c. xxxiv, there is a Prediction of things that came to pass some ages after they were foretold; namely, the destruction of the enemies of the *Jews*, which have been long ago destroy'd, as appears from many histories. Here are particulars set down well known to have taken place long after this Prediction.

From the beginning of the sixth verse to the end of the chapter the utter depopulation of *Idumea* is foretold, and described in the most lively and affecting terms, by the strongest and most expressive images: so that there can be no doubt of the meaning of the Prophecy. And if this has been long done; if the description of the most desolate and forlorn condition of that country, given in this chapter, has long been verified; if it now lies in the ruinous state there described; is it possible to doubt whether this be a true Prophecy or no?

It is expressly said that this country shall lie waste *from generation to generation, for ever and ever*, v. 10, 17. which signifies at least that it shall be in this condition a long time; but most probably that it will never recover from it.

Now if it be certainly true that *Idumea* or *Edom* has long continued in this desolate condition, and is not at all likely ever to rise out of it, and become again a nation; here

is a manifest instance of a Prophecy fulfill'd.

\* Pool's  
Annotations on  
the place.

The next I shall mention shall be that in *Amos* i. 5. against *Damascus* and *Syria*, in which the very place to which the inhabitants of *Syria* were to be carried captives is named. This Prophecy was evidently fulfilled \* about fifty years after it was deliver'd, when *Tiglatb-pileser* King of *Assyria* kill'd *Rezin* king of *Syria*, and carried his people captives to *Kir*, the place named in the Prophecy. And therefore this Prophecy is plainly and minutely fulfilled.

But if the Prophecy is not thought to have been delivered long enough before it was fulfilled, let us consider that which we read of *1 Kings* xiii. 2. naming the very person, *Josiah*, who should do the things spoke of: which was fulfill'd most minutely, as we read *2 Kings* xxiii. 16. above three hundred years after it was delivered: and that of *Isaiab* concerning *Cyrus* named thrice in *Isaiab*, Chap. xlv. v. 28. and Chap. xlv. v. 1. two hundred years before he was born, and in whom the Prophecy was most exactly fulfilled \*. This History is so well known, that *2 Chron.* xxxvi. 22, there can be no mistake nor imposition in this case. And how they that are no friends to *23. Ezra* i. 1, Prophecy can get rid of the force of this, I am entirely at a loss to imagine.

There is nothing but what may be denied or contradicted. But I would know what can be offered with the least appearance of reason, or that will bear any examination, to shew that this is not a plain, a clear, and distinct Prophecy; or that it was not exactly fulfill'd.

I could mention other Prophecies of the Old Testament as evidently verified as these I have



have mentioned. Dr. Sykes in his *Principles and Connection of Natural and Reveal'd Religion*, has consider'd several of them, and set them in so clear a light, that I think I may leave the issue of this cause upon what He hath said upon this subject.

But perhaps it may be needful here to obviate an objection that may be made, not indeed to those Prophecies mentioned, but to some that perhaps do not appear so plainly as others to have been true Prophecies. I may be told that I ought to give some satisfactory proof that all those Prophecies which I assert to come from God really did so ; or otherwise to allow men to reject them as spurious. This would lead me too far, *viz.* to examine the evidence for each book of scripture, and what authority there is to believe it wrote at the time when it is said to be wrote. But it seems sufficient, and all that is necessary, to prove the books wrote before the facts they foretell. At the same time that I say this, I am far from thinking that we ought to require evidences equally strong for every thing we assent to, even in things of this nature.

I own that the evidences we have for some Prophecies of the Old Testament are not so strong as those we have for others. Nor is it necessary they should ; because they may be sufficient justly to determine our assent, tho' they fall short of some other evidences. The age of some Prophecies is such, that no *collateral* evidences can be produced to prove the books which contain them, to be wrote before the facts. Here therefore we must rest upon *less* evidence than we do where we have other books and other authority to confirm what

we assent to. However in this case there is not wanting sufficient ground of assent, founded on the internal characters of the books themselves.

I have insisted here only upon the actual fulfilling of a Prophecy, and the distance of time between it's being delivered and fulfilled, as evidences of its being a true Prophecy. For these are the best and clearest we can have, especially of Prophecies delivered many years ago. Nor can I find any objection of sufficient strength to weaken these evidences.

As for the other marks I gave of a true Prophecy, Sect. III. we need not, as I there observed, have recourse to them all in the examination of every Prophecy. It is enough clearly to establish the truth of any antient Prophecy, that it was evidently verified long after it was delivered.

#### S E C T. IX.

*That some Prophecies of the Old Testament plainly relate to Jesus Christ.*

**I**F it be proved as clearly that some of the Prophecies of the Old Testament relate to *Jesus Christ*, as it has been proved that some Prophecies of that book have been fulfilled, I think no one need to doubt that *Jesus* was the Person designed in them. Indeed this has been done so evidently by several learned men, that I shall content myself with naming only two or three Prophecies of the Old Testament which appear to have been punctually fulfilled in *Jesus Christ*, and refer you to some other writers for other Prophecies clearly explained.

I think



I think I may safely begin with the famous Prophecy of *Jacob*, Gen. xlix. 10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

Whichsoever of the various significations of the Word *Shiloh*, mentioned by Mr. *Poole* upon the place you take, it is hardly applicable to any person but the great *Messiah* or *Anointed* so often spoken of in the Prophecies of the Old Testament. And the *Jewish Talmud*, the three *Chaldee Paraphrasts*, and several of the later *Jews* themselves refer it to him \*: \* *Poole's* Annotations upon the place. which these certainly would not have done without full conviction, because it gives the Christians so good a ground to apply this Prophecy to their *Messiah*, i. e. to *Jesus Christ*. And the *Jews* have ran themselves into several great Absurdities to avoid the force of it \*. † *Poole, ibid.*

That *Judah* did not cease to be a *Tribe*, and to have a power of jurisdiction, to give and execute laws, till the time of *Jesus Christ*; is so plain a fact, that no one can deny it. And that *Judah* lost all civil power and authority, and ceased to be a *Tribe*, or to have any government soon after our blessed Saviour's time, cannot be denied. And that *the gathering of the people*, or *Gentiles*, the people of other nations beside the *Jews* (as the *Jews* themselves understand the expression ||,) was || *Poole, ibid.* unto *Shiloh*; and that many of the heathens soon own'd *Jesus* their Lord, and embraced his doctrine, is granted by all. What remains then but that he was certainly the *Shiloh* here spoken of? Nor is it easy for history to relate these facts more plainly and punctually than this



this Prophecy has delivered them above seven-  
teen hundred years before they happened.

The next Prophecy concerning Christ I shall mention, shall be that in *Isa. liii.* where his life and sufferings, with their effects, are so plainly described, and answer so exactly to the Gospel History, that I am persuaded that both *Jews* and other unbelievers would be glad to get rid of this chapter, by proving it to relate to some other matters.

I think I need not go through the several particulars of this remarkable Prophecy, but may leave the reader to compare them with the History of the life and death of our Blessed Saviour. There is, however, one considerable difficulty in the chapter, namely, in these words, v. 9. *He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, tho' our Lord could not properly be said to have made his grave, or been buried, with the wicked, since he was buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus \**, two rich men, in the *new tomb* of the former †, which he had hewed out in a rock, and wherein was never man yet laid ‖. He might be said indeed to have been buried with, or by the rich; for both these men were rich, who joined in the same care of his burial. And he certainly died with the wicked; he was crucified between two thieves.

But this expression may perhaps be better translated, *He shall recompence his grave upon the wicked, and his death upon the rich*; he shall punish the rich, those wicked persons that procured his death, and brought him to the grave, *Pilate*, and the great ones of the *Jews*; as he did in an exemplary manner on *Pilate* himself, and not long afterwards upon the

\* John  
xix. 42.  
† Matt.  
xxvii. 60.  
‖ John  
xix. 41.

the *Jews*, by bringing the *Romans* upon them, who utterly destroyed their polity, and made most dreadful havock amongst them, according to our Saviour's express predictions. This sense the *Hebrew Words* will well bear. And it is entirely suitable to the following words, *Because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.* This is a good reason why his death should be severely punished; but no reason why he should die with the wicked \*.

The next I shall cite is that in *Haggai*, Chap. ii. v. 3—9. upon rebuilding the temple at *Jerusalem*, *Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it, as nothing? yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Josphua son of Josedech the high priest; and be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you saith the Lord of hosts; according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.*

\* Dr. Sykes's Principles and Conn. p. 163. and his Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion, p. 256.

There



There was to be something to raise the dignity of the second temple above that of the first. But this could not be the magnificence of its structure : for it was *in the eyes* of those who saw it *in comparison* of the former temple, *as nothing* : so that \* many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice, whilst many were shouting aloud for joy : so that the people could not discern the noise of the shouting of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people : for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off. Yet this latter temple was to exceed the former in glory. And the Prophet says expressly in the name of the Lord of Hosts, that the desire of all nations shall come ; and that God will fill this house with glory, and give peace in this place, namely by the presence of him who is here called the desire of all nations, who is eminently our Peace †, as he has reconciled us to God ‖, and as he preached peace to all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, to them which were afar off, and unacquainted with their duty to God, as well as to them that were nigh, and had received instructions from heaven \*\*. But before this there were to be great convulsions and disturbances in several parts of the world, expressed here by shaking the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, according to the known prophetic language, and explained by shaking all nations. Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, &c. There shall be very great alterations, and in a little time what is here foretold

• Ezra iii.  
12, 13.

† Eph. ii.

14.

‖ Eph. ii.

16. 2 Cor.

v. 18, 19.

Col. i. 20,

21.

\*\* Eph. ii.

17.



told shall begin ; as it did in the wars and commotions amongst the *Grecians*, *Persians*, and *Romans*. The *Persian* monarchy was overturned by the *Grecians* ; and these were afterwards conquered by the *Romans*, who had many civil dissensions amongst themselves after they had subjected most of the known world to their government.

If such commotions as are described by *shaking the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land* ; and by *shaking all nations* ; did begin soon after this Prophecy was delivered, and continue till near the time of Christ's birth ; and if he evidently answered the character of *the Desire of all nations*, and a person whose presence could *fill a house or temple with glory*, and make it more illustrious than a much more magnificent building, and *give peace* to mankind ; I think it must be allowed that this Prophecy is clearly fulfilled in all its parts. As for the commotions foretold, they are well known to have taken place in a most remarkable manner. And whether *Jesus* was the person to whom the description above perfectly answers, I appeal to the History of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven, and to the *peace* which God offered by Him to the *Jews* first, and then to the *Gentiles* ; that *peace* which was to bring the revolting world back to their duties and allegiance to God, and to make them perfectly happy : that *peace* which he began to preach, and which his Apostles taught in his name. All these are at least as well attested as any facts in antient history, as they are related by several persons whose writings are extant amongst us, and who could not but know whether these things were true

or false, and could have no interest in imposing upon their readers, and as they were confirmed by many who were so far from having any end to serve by inventing them, that they endured the greatest evils cruelty could lay upon them, and death itself in confirmation of these things. And this Prophecy was delivered five hundred and seventeen years before the birth of Christ.

I shall just mention the remarkable Prophecy of *Daniel*, Chap. ix. in which the very time of our Blessed Saviour's coming is set down, and so many circumstances of it exactly foretold, that one cannot deny it to relate to him, whatever difficulties may occur in fixing the time minutely when the seventy weeks there spoken of begun. The learned have varied indeed in their opinions upon this head, and upon one or two particulars of the Prophecy. But that he who will carefully consider the words of the Prophecy, will be so far satisfied at least as not to think the difficulties attending it to outweigh the clear evidence of history, by which it appears that what happened was most exactly foretold above five hundred and fifty years before it came to pass. I will therefore give you the words of this Prophecy, and the Explication of them. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the Vision and Prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.*

*Seventy weeks*] i. e. Of weeks of years, or seven times seventy years. Had the Prophet intended

intended to speak of the ordinary weeks of *seven days*, he would have called them so, as he does Chap. x. 2. *In those Days I Daniel was mourning three weeks of days.* And again ver. 3. *neither did I anoint myself till three weeks of days were fulfilled.* Seventy weeks therefore are here four hundred and ninety years.

*Are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city.]* i. e. are fixed; contain a period of time settled and determined, which very nearly concerns *thy people* the *Jews*, and *the city* which thou callest *Holy*.

*To finish transgression.]* At the end of four hundred and ninety years, the measure of the iniquities of the *Jews* shall be filled up, and their future transgression shall be no longer considered.

*And to make an end of sin.]* or to seal up sin. Their *punishment* (for that is the meaning of *sin*) is dated from that time. They shall be no longer the peculiar people of God.

*And to make reconciliation for iniquity.]* At the end of the said four hundred and ninety years, God will shew his readiness to admit the revolting world into favour, and to pardon their iniquities.

*And to bring in everlasting righteousness.]* Then will the law of everlasting righteousness be promulged to all mankind; that law of rectitude of life which shall continue to all for ever.

*And to seal up the Vision.]* Then shall God set his seal to, i. e. confirm, what has been discovered to his Prophets in Visions concerning the Messiah.



*And the Prophecy.]* It is in the original, *and the Prophet.* Then shall God likewise set his seal to, *i. e.* shew his approbation of that *Prophet* which he has promised.

*And to anoint the most Holy.]* And then shall he vest with all power that *most holy one*, who shall declare the will of God, and prove his mission by miracles, and finally shall be made king of that kingdom which God will at that time set up in the world.

This I think to be the obvious meaning of this remarkable Prophecy. Now from the seventh of *Artaxerxes*, *Ezra* vii. 7. to the passion of Christ are precisely four hundred and ninety years.

Suppose now that there are or may be some difficulties, or intricacies in the expressions of so remarkable a Prophecy, would that prove, that this or such like predictions are of no use or service?

In other cases we make large allowances for the want of sufficient information concerning circumstances of antiquity, or other matters necessary to the giving an exact and clear account of things: we do not immediately conclude a thing false because we are ignorant of some circumstances of it, or cannot take off the force of every objection to it: and think it enough to determine our assent, that the evidence for it is stronger than what we think can be fairly urged against it. And why we should not do the same in this case is something hard to say.

This Prophecy was so well understood by *Nebumias* a *Jewish* Rabbi, who lived fifty years before Christ, that he said that the time of the Messiah foretold in it could not be

be at a greater distance than those fifty years \*.

I think I have said enough to shew that some Prophecies of the old Testament plainly foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, and directed men to him as their Lord and Saviour, who was to give them peace and happiness. Upon what terms these were to be given they might learn in great measure from the moral precepts of the old Testament; and the many declarations there made of the perfect holiness and impartial justice, as well as great goodness of God.

## S E C T. X.

*An objection is answered concerning the citing and application of Prophecies from the Old Testament in the New.*

SOME are very fond of supposing a misapplication of Prophecies of the Old Testament in the New; and seem to think they have confuted Christianity by an instance or two of such supposed misapplication. I think these persons have been sufficiently answered by several learned men, who have shewn that some of their instances were not designed as applications of the Prophecies cited any otherwise than by way of accommodation. As when our Blessed Saviour says to the Scribes and Pharisees, Matt. xv. 7, 8, 9. *Well did Isaias*

\* Grot. de verit. l. v. c. 14. *Nebuchadnezzar's* dream, and *Daniel's* interpretation of it [Dan. ii. 2.] are plainly fulfilled in the four great monarchies, except what remains yet to be fulfilled.

*Isaias prophefy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, &c.* he does not mean that *Isaiab* foretold the behaviour of the *Jews* in his time; for it is most evident that what he here cites from *Isaiab* xxix. 13. was spoke by the Prophet with relation to the *Jews* in *Isaiab's* time. But his meaning is plainly this, *You answer to the character Isaiab gives of those to whom he spoke, as if that character was intended for you.* Again, these words so often quoted in the New Testament. *Hear ye indeed, but understand not, &c.* *Isaiah* vi. 9, 10.\* and applied to those to whom our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles were speaking, were certainly spoke by the Prophet to the *Jews* in his own time, and have the same signification with the former. So that before you pretend that a Prophecy is misapplied in the New Testament, you ought to *shew that what you affirm to be a Prophecy is such, if denied to be one*; and that the application of it was designed to signify that it was properly fulfilled in the persons or things to which it is applied. For if the words of Prophets are sometimes applied in another sense, as I have shewn they certainly are in these two instances, we are not immediately to conclude that what is cited in the New Testament from one of the Prophets, and said to be fulfilled in something spoken of, is supposed there to be a proper prediction of it.

This observation alone is sufficient to prevent great mistakes, and remove some objections made to the conduct of the apostles.

\* Matt.  
xiii. 14.  
Mar. iv.  
12.  
Luke viii.  
10.  
John xii.  
40.  
Act. xxviii  
26.  
Rom. xi.  
8.



## S E C T. XI.

*Some Prophecies delivered in the New Testament plainly fulfilled.*

**O**UR Blessed Saviour says to his Disciples, whom he is encouraging against persecution, *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foe's shall be they of his own household,* Matt. x. 34, 35, 36 \*.

\* Luke xii.

It is certain that this is not to be interpreted as a declaration of our Blessed Saviour's intention. And surely it cannot be a description of the tendency of his doctrine, which was plainly the very reverse; a tendency to peace and concord, and universal benevolence, which his whole life encouraged by a steady example. It remains then that this was a prediction of the ill use men would make of his excellent doctrine; that they would make his peaceful and benevolent religion an occasion of contention and cruelty, devastation and destruction. Nor is it uncommon to speak of mere events, as if they were primarily or principally the things intended. Thus in common language, we say a man *seeks*, or *pursues* his own destruction, when he does that which in the course of things tends to it.

Our Blessed Saviour would neither have preached, nor lived as he did, if he had designed to sow the seeds of contention, cruelty and mischief amongst men, or had not designed

signed on the contrary the greatest good to mankind.

Now whether this Prophecy of his has been fulfilled or not, or whether it is not still fulfilling, both the learned and the ignorant may be appealed to, every one that knows any thing at all of the condition and behaviour of Christians, and how men have treated one another upon pretence of the Christian Religion.

There has hardly been an age since the time of Christ, or a nation where Christianity has obtained, in which this Prophecy has not been most evidently verified; in which the warmest and most bloody contentions, and the greatest cruelties, have not taken place, amongst the nearest relations and dearest friends, upon this subject.

How many have been drove from place to place, stript of all their possessions, deprived of every thing that tends to make life comfortable and desirable, racked and tortured by various arts of cruelty, and at last received the only instance of kindness and humanity from their implacable enemies, namely a deprivation of life, upon pretence of the Christian Religion? This has been made the occasion of such cruelties, not only by professed enemies, but pretended friends to Christianity, who have set up their own authority in the room of the authority of Jesus Christ, and made *themselves absolute masters, fathers, and guides* of his servants, directly contrary to his express and strict prohibition, *Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10.* And let any one put another sense upon our Blessed Saviour's Words than the forbidding all human authority

city in matters of belief, that can. This was the sense in which the Scribes and Pharisees pretended to be *Fathers, Masters, and Guides*; in opposition to whose claim our blessed Saviour forbids his disciples to take such denominations upon themselves, or give them to any other men. \*

And are not these cruelties practised now by the pretended *Catholick Church*? Is not that Church plainly and literally *antichristian* in taking the authority of Christ upon her? Can it act more in opposition to Christ, than to claim such power to itself? Nor will its retaining of the *Christian* name and some *Christian* doctrines prove, that it is not *Antichrist*, whilst it acts in opposition to the authority of Christ and to that piety and universal charity he requires. It has not only greatly corrupted the true religion, but may well be said as it is, *Rev. xvii. 6.* to be *drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*, of those that regard his word and authority rather than any man's upon earth. And it is plain from the description there given, and the place it has in the book, that the Church of *Rome* is meant.

But is it not strange that the most benevolent and peaceful religion should be made an occasion of the fiercest contentions and the greatest cruelties? How could Christianity give such offence to any part of mankind as to excite them to use its professors so barbarously as the heathen persecutors used them? How could they be provoked to such cruelties against men of the strictest morals, and most

inoffen-  
 \* *Whitby* upon the place.



inoffensive in their lives ; against men of the most kind and benevolent behaviour, and the most extensive charity and goodness ? And if we can find a reason for this, how shall we account for the most pernicious quarrels, the cruelties and murders that have been and are amongst Christians themselves, upon pretence of their Religion ? Can any of them justify these things with the least appearance of Reason ? Are not they directly and most evidently contrary to the Religion they profess ?

However strange and unaccountable these things may seem at the first view, when we consider the passions of men, we cannot be at a loss for an account of them.

If indeed all men were resolved to act according to the principles of reason, and the best information they could get of their duty ; there could be no room for the mischiefs spoken of ; Christians could not be persecuted by any persons, much less would they persecute one another ; their Religion would recommend itself and them to all that should be acquainted with both, and every thing contrary to the quarrels, disorders, and cruelties it has occasionally produced, would be clearly seen to be the genuine effect of it. But as bad men turn the best things into mischief and destruction, the best Religion is made by them to serve the worst purposes, the very contrary to those it was intended by our Blessed Saviour to answer, and for which it is in itself fit and necessary. They quarrel, and do mischief to one another, not in obedience to the commands of Christ, but in direct opposition to them. They set up their own authority, as already observed, instead of submitting to his. Nor is it so much

much *Religion*, as their own ambition and selfish views, that they promote by their zeal and fury. They would dictate religion to one another, and force their *own forms* of it as opportunity offers. And when any thing of this kind is attempted, it is always from ignorance, mistake, or bad views; either religion is made a meer cloke for the worst designs and practices; or men entertain false notions of peace, or of authority; or they are ignorant of true Religion. And it is well known that a great share of zeal commonly supplies the place of good understanding and sound judgment: And the artifice of some easily inspires others with zeal for what is false, absurd, and mischievous, instead of teaching them what is true and just, and of the happiest consequence to mankind. The great mischief is, that men of good understanding, and good learning too, have been, and are too often borne down, and forced to submit to what they cannot prevent.

But if our Blessed Saviour foresaw how men would abuse his doctrine; that they would make it a pretence for the greatest impiety and the greatest cruelty; and therefore make themselves and one another worse and more miserable instead of being better and happier for it, as they certainly would be if they made a right use of it; if, I say, our Blessed Saviour foresaw that by perverting the ends of his Religion they would make it an occasion of the greatest evils instead of the greatest good; would it not have been better for him not to have taught it, however good in itself? For where is the advantage to mankind in possessing what *might* be beneficial, if it be really

foreseen that it would prove hurtful and destructive to them?

This, I think, is easily answered from what has been already observed. For it is plain from thence, that as the doctrine of Christ tends in itself to the peace and happiness of men, it was his design to effect these by it. The religion of Christ was to offer men great and powerful motives to rectitude of action, or true holiness of life: it was not to give mankind any mere speculative propositions, useless to good morals, but it was to promote virtue and universal goodness, by inculcating principles that would make every serious person more careful and intent upon his true happiness. A creature endowed with reason, was to use this advantage, not to abuse it: and if many have abused it, that is no more a reason why it should not be given to them, than it is a reason why they should not have any such faculty as reason, because many do abuse that too. And if men pervert this gracious design, and turn that to their hurt and destruction which is intended for their greatest benefit and advantage, the fault is plainly theirs, and the same whether foreseen or unforeseen, foretold or not foretold, since it proceeds from their own perverseness. It seems rather indeed to be an aggravation of it that it was foretold by our Blessed Saviour, since that was a kind caution to them not to be guilty of it. And this perhaps may have kept many from it, who would otherwise have been involved in the common guilt. Let it be further observed, that this perverseness and cruelty does not, nor ever did *universally* take place amongst Christians. They ~~that~~ understand, and are resolved to practise the



the Religion of Christ, will never be guilty of it. Such persons always did, and always will abhor it. So that our Religion has its proper influence, and its happy effects upon them, and therefore was not delivered in vain, tho' too many make it an occasion of mischief and distraction.

I thought it proper to clear this remarkable Prophecy of our Blessed Saviour from objections, as well as to observe how evidently it has been fulfilled, and is fulfilling.

Nor is it less evident that he foretold the destruction of the Temple and City of *Jerusalem*, and such particular circumstances of it, as no human conjecture could have discovered, forty years before they punctually took place.

The only thing that has confounded this Prophecy, is that some have confounded the several parts of this prediction of our Lord; applying what he has said about the end of the world to what he has said about the destruction of *Jerusalem*. Whereas the several parts of this Prophecy should be kept distinct, and by comparing what the several Evangelists have said, and by filling up, or supplying from One, what the Other may have omitted, it will be easy to keep distinct, what concerns the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and what relates to the End of the World.

The destruction of *Jerusalem* our Saviour clearly foretold; and in such words as exactly answer to the Event: and for which the Appeal is made to *Josephus*, a *Jew*, an eye-witness; and to other historians who relate what happened forty years after the Crucifixion of our Lord.

I shall

I shall next consider, *Rev. ix. 20, 21.* compared with *1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3.* in which places we have a plain description of the present corruptions that were foretold to arise in the Church of *Christ*.

Upon the sounding of the trumpet of the sixth angel, spoken of *Rev. ix. 13.* a great destruction is plainly foretold, which is described likewise upon the sixth angel's pouring out of his vial, *Chap. 16.* \* and was, I think most evidently fulfilled in the conquests made by the *Turks* in *Asia Minor*, and not ceasing till they had got the Empire of *Constantinople*: And from that time it is well known what a torment they have been to *Europe*.

They who would be further satisfied in this particular may consult *Sir Isaac Newton* and *Mr. Mede*.

*The four Angels* are said to be loosed, *Rev. ix. 15.* which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men, who are said, *v. 18.* to be killed by the fire, the smোক, and the brimstone, issuing out of the mouths of the Horses described in the Verse before. The Apostle goes on, and says, *v. 20, 21.* And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, or the Souls of dead men, as the word *δαίμονες* here translated devils is well known to signify, and idols of gold and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries,

\* The sounding of the Trumpets, and the pouring out of the Vials, are Synchronals; the Vials answering to the Trumpets in their order. *Sir Is. Newton.*

ries,\* nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts. This is what I would particularly insist on, because it is intelligible to the meanest capacities, and will help to explain what St. Paul has said, 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3. The Apostle's Words are these, *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times* (an expression commonly signifying the times of the Messiah †) *some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils ||; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*

Here are indeed different particulars mentioned in these passages; but all of them such as describe a general corruption, and are, I think, plainly applicable to the church of Rome.

As for their worshipping of *Demons*, or the souls of dead men, to which the *doctrines of Demons* plainly relates, it is most evident that they pray to Saints as well as Angels, who may likewise come under the denomination of *Demons*, according to the common sense of the word amongst the antients. They pray directly to these for Blessings of every kind, as abundantly appears from their books of devotion.

And that they worship images as truly as ever any nation of Heathens did, is manifest from hence, that whatever honour or worship Heathens ever gave to images, papists give them exactly the same. They suppose some Divinity

\* Ταυ φαρμακίων.  
† δαίμονιων.

† Dr. Whitby upon this place.



Divinity residing in them ; some Power, some Being who works miracles of various kinds : and this draws from the people a worship and honour to the image, and alienates their minds from the great God, whom alone they ought to serve.

How far they may be charged with murders, and with giving encouragement many ways to vice, is too plainly to be seen : The setting up of human authority instead of divine ; the preferring the mere belief of their doctrines and conformity to their modes and ceremonies of worship before *the weightier matters of the* law of God, before integrity of mind and a good life, contrary to the plain words of Scripture in many places, and to common sense and reason ; and their most shocking cruelties which too frequently fall upon none but innocent and virtuous persons, such as dare not dissemble in matters of Religion, and consequently how far they encourage *hypocrisy*, is notorious. One scandalously immoral may live unhurt, and almost unblamed, amongst them, whilst he who has sense enough to be rationally religious, and Christianity enough to pay a due regard to the Holy Scriptures, and integrity enough to confess his real sentiments, is stripped of all worldly enjoyments, inhumanly tortured, and barbarously put to death, by them.

What are their *Sorceries*, *φάσματα*, but their artful imposing on men's senses, and making them to believe that they may obtain the favour of God, by things substituted by slight of hand in the place of virtue and true Religion ? Such are Absolutions, Indulgences, Penances, Pardons, &c.

Their

Their fornications are idolatry in every respect. It is under this term that idolatry is usually represented in Scripture, and whoever are guilty of setting up Idol Gods and Idol Mediators, they are said to be guilty of fornication. And the reason of this language is plain, if we consider that the Church of Christ is represented as the *Spouse*, or as *married* to the Lamb of God. Now every setting up of idols is a breach of fidelity to Him, whose property the Church is : and idolatry is spiritual fornication, or a delivering oneself to another's use and service, when we had engaged ourselves solely to Christ.

Now if this be the case, does not the description well suit this pretended holy catholic church ? If false worship, idolatry, murder, and the encouragement of every vice several ways, will entitle any society or body of men to it, the church of *Rome* must have it as their own. And indeed if any Church can put in a better, or so good a claim to it, I think it ought to have it. But that Christians suffered greatly from the *Turks* from the year 1300 or thereabout, will not be denied. Nor is it doubted that the tyranny, the idolatry, the cruelty, and superstition of the church of *Rome*, then and long before that time pretending to be the *universal Christian Church*, were as great as they are now. And whether they have *repented* of any of these crimes or not, after the devastations and destructions made first by the *Saracens*, and afterwards by the *Turks*, no one will doubt. That they have been greatly corrupt both in point of doctrine and morals, is plain from every account of them we have. That their idolatry,

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tyranny,

tyranny, and cruelty continue no body can deny, who knows what these words mean. Let any one therefore judge (especially if it be allowed that the destruction described, *Rev. ix. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.* was wrought by the *Turks* at the time before mentioned, which I think is most evident from history) let any one, I say, judge whether the following words already cited, *and the rest of the men, &c.* may not fairly be applied in a very remarkable manner to that very corrupted Church. *They were not killed by the plagues before mentioned: yet repented not of their various impieties, murders, and other sins.*

•Matt. xv.  
9.  
Mark vii.  
7.

And this Church is more particularly described *1 Tim. iv.* before cited. If they have *departed from the faith, by teaching for doctrines the commandments of men \**, and especially by *idolatry*, which was always looked upon by the uncorrupt worshippers of the true God as *apostacy* from him, when practised by those who have professed the true Religion, and is always so represented in the Old Testament; if they *give heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of daemons*, if they abound in false, unscriptural, absurd and idolatrous worship; if *they speak lies in hypocrisy*, and use numerous pious frauds, well known to all who are acquainted with their practices, and therefore may well be said to *have their conscience seared with a hot iron*; if they *forbid to marry*, and command *to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth*; and if *the Spirit of God speaketh expressly, that in the latter times*



*times* there shall be such persons ; where is the difficulty or injustice of applying this Prophecy eminently to the Church of *Rome* ? And who is there that does not know that this Church perfectly answers the character given in the Prophecy, but those who either know little of her, or are blinded and infatuated by her monstrous errors and deceits ?

But some learned men would confine this description to the *Cataphrygians* and other ancient *Hereticks*, most of whom did *forbid marriage, and command to abstain from meats* \*. But though the *Cataphrygians* agree to one part of this Prophecy, they were not guilty of, nor ever charged with the *doctrine of Demons*, nor with the *Hypocrisy of speaking lies*.

So that if it may be objected that these ancient *Hereticks* absolutely forbid marriage and the eating of flesh ; and therefore exactly answer the character here given ; yet I think it seems absurd to apply the Prophecy to such as agree but to a part of it, and not to those who do all the things described in the Prophecy.

But Dr. *Whitby* says that this expression, The last times, or, The last days, *whenever we meet with it in the New Testament, manifestly refers to the beginnings of Christianity, and signifies the last times of the Jewish state, or Oeconomy, concurring with the times of the Messiah, and the erecting of his kingdom, by calling the Gentiles, and settling a Christian Church to succeed that of the Jews* †. Yet he allows that the *Jewish* doctors lay this down

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as

\* *Epiphanus Her.* 48. p. 410. S. 8. *Whitby* upon  
1 Tim. iv. 3.

† Upon 1 Tim. iv. 1.

as a rule, that wherever we find this phrase, in the latter days, we are to understand it of the age or times of the Messiah; of which he gives several instances\* Now the times of the Messiah comprehend *all* his times: the expression is not to be confined to only the beginning, or to the middle of his age, *αἰών*, but is to take in all the time from his first setting up his kingdom quite to the end of his reign. And in consequence when any thing is said to happen *in the last days*, the time of such event is not to be confined to the beginnings of Christianity, but may relate to things that come to pass many hundred years after the death of Christ.

The natural sense therefore of this expression, signifying the time of the Messiah's kingdom, takes in all *the times of the last great revelation God will give to mankind of his will*. And in many, if not all the places in the New Testament, as well as those of the Old, where the expression is found, it will bear this sense.

I think, after what has been observed, the application of both these passages, that out of the *Revelation* of St. *John*, and that out of *1 Tim.* and their being compared together, may be fully and clearly justified. They both are found to agree punctually with the present condition of the Christian world, and eminently with the Church of *Rome*: and both, when fairly examined, describe the same evil doctrines and practices. The difference between them is principally in this, that some particulars of the general corruption spoke of are mentioned in one, and others in the other.

\* *ibid.*

other. But every one who will fairly compare them together will find that they agree in the description of a wicked and abandoned set of men, wherever to be found. And when such a set of men is found as perfectly answers to the description in every circumstance delivered in both passages, how can we fairly deny those persons to be intended?

The total downfall and ruin of this miserably corrupted body of Christians is plainly foretold, *Rev.* xviii. But there is one particular which I think requires our attention, if possible, more than the rest, and is sufficient to put it out of all doubt, if there should be any, that the Church of *Rome*, and no other Church or State is or can be spoken of there: I mean this expression made use of in reckoning up the several merchandises of the city described, *slaves*, or *bodies*, as it is in the original, *and souls of men*, *Rev.* xviii. 13.

Now if it be possible any way to make merchandise of the *souls of men*, the Church of *Rome* certainly does it: and no other Church can be named which does it so emphatically.

This Church pretends to have the disposal of *the souls of men*; to have it in her power to save or damn them. But the thing in which she as evidently pretends to *trade* with human souls as possible, is the *indulgences* known and acknowledged to be sold by her. These are pretended to release souls from the pains of purgatory, as severe and intense, they say, as those of hell itself, and differing nothing from them but in duration. And for a proper sum of money the souls of such persons as have not merited enough by their good works,



works, or expiated their bad ones by sufficient penances, to get immediately to heaven after death, and yet are too good for hell, must therefore have purgation to fit them for heaven, I say, for a proper sum of money the souls of such persons are to be released so many days or years sooner than they would otherwise be released from those dreadful pains, according as they make their bargain. And Holy Church keeps a sufficient stock of supernumerary merits, that is, such as are more than the persons to whom they originally belong want for their own use, out of which stock these *indulgences*, as they are called, are *sold*, not given. You must make some bargain for them, or go without them. The common way of getting them is to pay ready money for them. But they are sometimes purchased by proper services, especially such as are unjust and cruel. Many of them are granted for the service of the *holy inquisition*, exceeding every thing you can name in tyranny and cruelty.

One would think that no one of common understanding could be so far imposed upon as to be thus the *property* of superstitious and unreasonable men, upon pretence of any religion; and much more, under the cover of the Christian Religion, so widely different in itself from every thing that can give encouragement to such kind of traffick.

I can hardly see how it is possible for any one but a mere bigot to such superstitions to speak of them without both ridicule and detestation. And it is hard to say whether they are more mischievous or ridiculous. They  
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have been as much exposed by Popish as Protestant writers \*.

I shall mention one Prophecy more of the New Testament, as plainly fulfilled as possible, namely that which is delivered 2 *Thess.* ii. where the Apostle says that the *day of Christ* shall not come *except there be a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.* ver. 3, 4. *And now ye know, says he, what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time.* This is said by the fathers in general to relate to the *Roman Empire* †, which was actually destroyed before the power of the Church of Rome, so productive of mischief, came to a very considerable height. *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,* ver. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Now

\* *Venalia nobis*

*Templa, sacerdotes, altaria sacra, coronæ,  
Ignis, thura, preces, cœlum est venale, Deusque.*

*Calam. Bapt. Mantuan. lib. 3.*

*Æneas Sylvius ad Joh. Perigallum Epist. 66.*

† *Whitby* upon the place.

Now what can be a more exact description of every gross corruption in the Church of Christ than this? There was to be a *falling away* from the truth and purity of the Christian Religion, and a *man of sin to be revealed*, or discover himself, who is called likewise *the son of perdition*. He was to *oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; sitting as God in the temple of God, shewing himself as much as possible to be, i. e. acting as if he were God*. Whether this be true of the Pope and Church of Rome let any one judge. What power or authority of God over his Church have they not usurped, or pretended to exercise? Do they not pretend to be infallible? Have they not claimed a right to dispose of both the *bodies and souls of men*? Do they not destroy the former, and pronounce sentence upon the latter, if their impious laws are disobeyed? They pretend that future everlasting happiness and misery depend upon their determinations; and that they can send a man to heaven or hell. The effects of their sacraments (which they believe to be means of carrying men to heaven, and seem to represent as working in the manner in which *charms* are supposed to work) they say are owing entirely to the *intention* of the priests that administer them. So that a man cannot get to heaven, though he does his best even in their way of religion, if a wicked priest has no mind he should. Do they not excommunicate and deliver over to Satan, the best of men, for worshipping God according to their consciences, and only for opposing their tyranny?

What



What is this; and what are many more of their doctrines, but *exalting* their Church *above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; sitting as God in the temple of God*, and endeavouring to *shew themselves* by their actions *that they are God*? And as for the *power, and signs, and lying wonders, and deceivableness of unrighteousness in the man of sin*; they are so manifest and notorious, that I think it impossible that these words should be more justly applied to any man or body of men than to the Pope and Church of *Rome*. And it is surprising that so many, and some very learned as well as sincere and honest men, should be deceived so far, as to give into these and such like absurdities. Were they to allow all men, as they ought, to read the scriptures, and get the best information in religion they could, they could not succeed as they do in their works of darkness; their power and polity would soon be at an end. But, it seems, men are to profess, and *practise* (if that be possible) a religion they are not suffered to learn or understand; and this upon pretence of the danger of believing wrong; to prevent which, the direct way would be to teach them right; especially since some of their writers own that the scripture is plain and easy to be understood in things necessary to salvation\*. And if this be true, what just pretence can there be for hindering men from enquiring into Religion? It answers the ends of ambition and avarice in church governours; but can answer no good end whatsoever.

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\* Vid. *Pool's Dialogue; and Nullity of the Romish Faith*, Chap. 7. Sect. 4.

The Apostle seems plainly here to allude to the Prophecy of Daniel, Chap. xi. ver. 35, 36. *And some of them of understanding shall fall to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed. And the king shall do according to his will, and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that is determined, shall be done.* But Dr. Whitby expounds the words of the Apostle concerning the Jews, and the great disturbances they made before the destruction of Jerusalem. He owns his is a *new interpretation* \*, and does not dare trust it by itself, but thinks it expresses the *primary* intention of the Apostle, yet *denies not that these words*, whom the Lord shall consume by the spirit, or *Breath* of his mouth, *may have a more full completion in the destruction of the Beast, or mystical Babylon, which is also to be slain by the sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ, and destroyed by the fierceness of his wrath, and, with the false Prophet to be cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone* †; and he acknowledges every part of the description of *the man of sin* given by the Apostle to agree to the pope and church of Rome. But I think he by no means accounts for the *revealing*, or discovery of *the man of sin*, who, 'tis certain, was not discovered when the Apostle writ this epistle, at which time there was some person or thing which *let and withheld* him from being revealed: the very argument he uses

\* Beginning of his Preface to 2 *Thess.* † Note upon 2 *Thess.* 2. 8.

uses to prove that *Simon Magus* was not the man of sin spoke of \*. And I think it holds equally good against his interpretation. But he says the Jews were fully revealed to be the man of sin, either by their revolt from the Romans, which may be here called *derosavla*, or a falling away; or by the apostacy of many converted Jews from Christianity †. But neither of these senses of the word *revealed* will answer his purpose. For in the first place, no one can in propriety of speech be said to be *revealed* or discovered by any particular action, how well soever suited to his known character, and continual behaviour, if there be something that hindered him for a time from doing this action, as the apostle expressly says here: Remember ye not, that when I was with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. Can this be said of any man; or body of men, then known to answer the character given of the man of sin? How is such a one revealed or discovered by any particular action or actions of a piece with his known life and behaviour, if he be hindered from being discovered? He only appears the very same person he appeared before, and nothing new in his character or disposition is discovered. But if a character be given (especially if it be taken from an antient Prophet) of a person who is to reveal or discover himself by such particular modes of acting, it is most evident, that this person is to come, and is not present and acting as described when he is thus spoke of. The same is true with regard to any body or

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society

\* Preface to 2 *Thess.* S. 7. † *Ibid.* S. 12. and Note on 2 *Thess.* ii. 3.



society of men. So that whether you understand *the man of sin* to signify a *person*, or a *body of men*, it must signify some person or body of men not in being, or not known and discovered, when the apostle gave his description. Nor can I think any apostacy of the converted *Jews* will fairly signify the *revealing* of *the man of sin*. For then the apostates only must be *the man of sin*, which the Doctor would not assert. But, on the contrary, he says the descriptions which the apostle gives of *the man of sin* are in the *present tense*, and signify what the *Jews* were before the apostacy he speaks of\*; though directly contrary to what he said before † when he was proving that *Simon Magus* could not be *the man of sin* because already *revealed* or discovered. It is very common for Prophecies of things to come, to be delivered in the *present tense*. And I think it necessary from the context, and the natural sense of the word *revealed*, to understand the apostle's description of some person or persons, not as acting when he writ as he describes his or their actions, but some time afterwards. So that we must look out for some other sense of what the apostle here delivers, and some other person or persons described by him than the *Jews*; otherwise we must be at a loss for the application of what he says. That the pope and church of *Rome* do answer that character, the Doctor, as I said before, grants. But then he hints, as I observed, that these are meant only in a secondary sense. But (not now to examine the reasonableness of understanding Prophecies in a double sense || ) if the

|| See Dr. Sykes's Principles and Connection.

\* Pref. to 2 *Thess.* S. 12. † *Ibid.* S. 7.

the *Jews* and their conduct cannot be meant here, as I have already proved, and there is a remarkable body of men who answer the description given in every particular, as plainly as if it had been given after they appeared and acted in the manner described, which the Doctor, and every body must allow; we need not search for some third person or body of men to whom the words of the apostle may fairly be applied. I think the Doctor has said enough to shew clearly that *Mahomet* could not be meant by them †, according to the interpretation of many papists, who are willing to screen their indulgent mother church from the application of them to her. Nor do they produce any other person or persons, to whom the description given by the apostle can at all agree. He says, v. 7. *The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way.* This seems plainly to be spoken of the spirit of ambition, usurpation and tyranny appearing in the several contentions and quarrels which this apostle often reproves in his epistles, and which were the foundations of the corruptions which were in due time to grow up to the stature of the perfect man of sin. Christians were apt to bite and devour one another \* in his time. And he says to the *Galatians*, *Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another:* Gal. v. 26. And again, Chap. vi. ver. 3, *If a man think himself something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* Many such cautions are found in the writings of this apostle.

And

† Preface to 2 *Thess.* S. 1.

And St. *John*, *Eph.* iii. ver. 9, 10. complains of *Diotrephes*, who loved to have the pre-eminence, and therefore would not receive him, nor others who, like him, preached the gospel of Christ in its simplicity and purity; but *prated against them with malicious words, and forbid them that would receive them, and cast them out of the church.* But though our blessed Lord's disciples were thus expressly forbidden by him and by the apostles to entertain any thoughts of exercising authority one over another; tho' they were required by him to be as little children, free from ambitious designs, and every evil purpose and intention; though he particularly forbade them to be called *rabbies, fathers, masters, and guides*, or acknowledge any man but himself as their *rabbi, father, or*

\* Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. *master* \*, that is, to be lords of their con- sciences, and dictate religion to them, as already observed; though, I say, our blessed Lord's disciples were thus cautioned against ambition, and religious tyranny; we see that many christians in the times of the apostles were very much inclined to set themselves up as lords over their brethren; and therefore the apostles, as well as our blessed Saviour, gave cautions against such a mischievous and destructive proceeding as this appeared to be, and greatly inculcated meekness, humility, and universal benevolence.

Men are too apt to be over fond of power and authority, and usurp it when they can. But surely no human power is so mischievous and so absurd as that which is exercised over the consciences of men, which might well be called a *mystery of iniquity* when it only began to work, and did not shew itself in its full force,



force, dealing destruction abundantly both to the bodies and souls of men, encouraging hypocrisy rather than sincerity and true religion, introducing idolatry and superstition, and using every kind of cruelty upon the best of men, the resolutely good and virtuous. This *mystery of iniquity* work'd when the apostle wrote his epistle. But it was *let* or hindered from coming to maturity of mischief. And the apostle says, *He who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way.* That is, the State of the *Roman* empire will hinder the full exercise of that tyranny and those corruptions which are now therefore called *the mystery of iniquity*, tho' beginning, as observed, to *work*. It was hindered by the civil power from coming to maturity. For however tyrannical the heathen *Roman* emperors or governors were in themselves, yet they would not suffer the clergy to tyrannize over one another, and exercise an authority, such as they did afterwards, when riches, and power, and dominion was given them, and even the emperors themselves were brought in subjection to them. No wonder then that *Rome* heathen did prevent an ecclesiastical tyranny, and kept the man of sin from revealing himself all the while it continued heathen. Nor can there be a more plain and natural account of the hindrance of the *revealing of the man of sin*: Nor is any thing more clear than what our church historians tell us in confirmation of this point. For there were certainly the beginnings of tyranny and corruption in the church as soon, or near as soon as they could possibly appear, and in the fourth century at least, in which *Vigilantius* and several bishops as well as priests, were called

called hereticks by *Jerom* and others for speaking against the lighting of wax candles in honour of the martyrs, the veneration of reliques, praying for the dead, the injunction of the celibacy of the clergy, and monkery, and most of the corruptions and superstitions of the church of *Rome* were introduced. In this century several fathers of the church, namely the two *Gregory's*, *Nazianzen* and *Nys-sen*, *Ephraem Syrus*, and *Basil*, prayed to deceased persons whom they looked upon to have been holy and good in this life, and especially to martyrs. And this practice is recommended and insisted upon by *Chrysostom* \*.

Why then should Dr. *Whitby* say that *the pope and clergy of Rome were orthodox, and free from exalting themselves above all that is called God, or from wearing out the saints with persecution, till some hundred years after the dissolution of the Roman empire by the exile of Augustulus, A. D. 475. †* How *orthodox* and free from tyranny and superstition, how free from creed-making and imposition, the church of *Rome* in particular then was, (and it was of course the chief christian church when the *Roman* empire became christian,) you may judge from what has been observed. And perhaps such instances are seldom taken notice of by protestant writers, that the papists may not triumph in even this antiquity of their doctrines and customs, and that these writers may not lay open the great errors of those fathers whose authority they are fond of ||. But let

\* Sir *Isaac Newton*. Observations upon *Daniel*, Chap. xiii. 14. † Note upon 2 *Thess.* ii. 2, 8.

|| Mr. *Mede* speaks of some who are more tender of the honour of our fathers upon earth, than of the glory of our Father in heaven, p. 690. Edit. 3.

let us not be ashamed of the truth, nor conceal it when it illustrates any part of scripture, or shews the accomplishment of any scripture Prophecy.

And let it be fairly considered whether the ecclesiastical councils held long before the time of *Augustulus* did not take that authority upon them so expressly forbid by our Blessed Saviour, of determining things as *Masters, Fathers, and Guides* \*, or, as St. *Peter* expresses it, of *being lords over God's heritage* †; and whether they did not dictate as from their own authority in matters of faith, and pronounce unchristian and inhuman anathemas against those who should dare to contradict them; and whether this was not their common practice.

When these things are considered, we shall be sensible that though the Church of *Rome* did not arrive at its summit and perfection of impiety, tyranny, idolatry, and cruelty, till *some hundred years after the* dissolution of the *Roman* empire, A. D. 475. (as it was necessary that great corruptions should be completed by degrees; nor can any thing, good or bad, come to such a height as these have done on a sudden;) yet I will appeal to any one, who considers what has been said, whether *Rome* heathen was not that which *letted*, or hindered the great iniquity from working so forcibly as otherwise it would have done.

And if I am now asked what the corruptions of the Church of *Rome* were to the *Thessalonians*, or what need there was to give them any notice of them; the answer, I think, is easy. They seemed to expect the coming of Christ to judgment. But the Apostle says

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this

\* Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10.

† 1 Pet. v. 3.



this will not be till there be a great *falling away*, and *the man of sin* be revealed, whom he particularly describes. Let it be observed that he gives no caution to the *Thessalonians* to beware of this man of sin. He tells them *the mystery of iniquity doth already work*, but at present it is hindered from growing up to maturity. And as they did not see *the revelation of the man of sin*, they might be sure that our Blessed Lord was not coming to judgment. Nor do I see any, no not the least foundation for imagining that *the day of Christ* spoken of, *2 Thess. ii. 1.* should be thought to mean the destruction of *Jerusalem*. It plainly relates to the last judgment: and as it relates to that, there is hardly any misunderstanding of the following words after what has been said about them, without the strongest prejudice. And if we consider this epistle as wrote for the benefit of Christians in after-ages, as well as those to whom it was immediately sent, we may easily see the use of this most punctual Prophecy delivered in it. I have shewn that it is clearly and evidently fulfilled in all its parts, except the *destruction of the man of sin*, which I can see no reason to think, as Dr. *Whitby* does \*, that the Apostle speaks of, as *soon* to follow his being *revealed*. Nor can there appear any reason to stagger the faith of Christians, as the Doctor objects †, from his not being *destroyed*, when they see this Prophecy plainly fulfilled in his *revelation*.

I hope I have now shewn that some Prophecies in the New Testament are evidently fulfilled.

\* Preface to *2 Thess. S. 3.* and note upon chap. ii. ver. 8.

† *ibid.*

fulfilled. But some perhaps may not be sufficiently sensible of the use of Prophecy. I will therefore say something of that in the next Section.

## S E C T. XII.

### *Of the Use of Prophecy.*

ONE great use of it is to shew to us at any distance of time the superintendency of Divine Providence over this world; a thing of great moment to mankind, and the knowledge of which will, if duly regarded, have the happiest influence upon our minds, teach us to discharge our duty, and consult our welfare, in the best manner, so as certainly to succeed in our endeavours to shun misery and destruction, and obtain safety and happiness, which are necessary consequences of the Divine Favour.

If the doctrine of Divine Providence be established by certain, clear, and evident predictions of future events, great, remarkable, and extensive, foretold long, even ages before they happened; who that is acquainted with such predictions and such events, can be stupid or hardy enough to doubt the truth of this doctrine? And who that seriously considers it can suffer himself to neglect his duty, or forego his happiness? For we may conclude that he who thus governs human affairs now, and gives us these kind notices of his providence, will call us to a most impartial account hereafter, and reward or punish us as we shall have acted well or ill in this life.

2. When any person comes from God, and delivers to us any doctrine, which tends to promote virtue, if it be a doctrine which reason cannot discover, the fulfilling of such Prophecy will be a good evidence that it comes from God, and ought to be attended to. Suppose *e. g.* that a future resurrection should be foretold by one that delivers a Prophecy from God, when we see the Prophecy compleated, one cannot but be sure that the Prophet was influenced by a superior Being, and therefore what he says is so highly probable, as to deserve our utmost attention and regard.

But perhaps I may be told of heathen oracles and *Sibyls* and many pretended Prophets and Enthusiasts, who have attempted to foretell future events, and many of whose predictions have been actually verified. And if so, it may be said, that Prophecy may not come from God only, as is pretended, because we cannot be sure from events that a Prophecy comes from God, unless we allow that all those who have foretold things that have come to pass were divinely inspired.

I would ask, in the *first* place, whether it be so plain and certain, that these have foretold future events beyond the reach of human conjecture? And again, whether they and their Prophecies will fairly bear the test of the rules laid down, Sect III.\* And whether any one of the Prophets or Prophecies of scripture appears false when examined by those rules; and whether these oracles and pretended Prophecies ever failed in the truth of their Predictions. It is certain the pretended gods and oracles in *Isaiab's* time (who did then sufficiently prove himself a true Prophet, and  
now

\* Vide *Van Dale* de Oraculis.



now most evidently appears to have been so from the fulfilling of many of his Prophecies) I say, it is certain that the false gods and pretended oracles in his time were at least very deficient in this respect; as appears from the challenges in his book to them to shew themselves true Gods by foretelling what should happen. They are challenged to foretell things either near or at a distance, *the things that are coming, and shall come* \*. *Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods*, says the Almighty by that great Prophet, *Isai. xli. 23.*

3dly, We may and ought to conclude from the fulfilling of Prophecies both of the Old and New Testament, and especially those relating to our Blessed Saviour, that the Christian Religion is of Divine Original.

If it be possible to prove any fact at all which we do not see, this truth may be proved with great certainty by Prophecy. For since it plainly appears that so many things foretold both in the Old and New Testament are punctually come to pass; and since the Prophecies of both are daily fulfilling, and so many things foretold concerning Jesus Christ are evidently fulfilled; we cannot but be sensible, that the doctrines taught us by our Blessed Saviour came from God. And that such Prophecies were fulfilled and are fulfilling, which were delivered many ages before they were fulfilled, we have as plain testimony as history and our own experience can give us.

It is easy to cavil and contradict, and to raise objections against a cause. But in the present case it must be shewn that the Prophecies

\* *Isaiah xli. 7.*

phesies I have been speaking of have not been fulfilled, as it is certain by this time whether they have or no. Let it be shewn that our histories which give us the facts foretold, are lies ; or that the facts mentioned were not foretold long before they happened. Let it be made appear that the books of scripture were not written long before the events therein mentioned : or that those facts lay within the reach of human conjecture : or else the evidence will be little short of demonstration for the truth of the religion of Christ.

*Lastly*, Scripture Prophecies are of use, to warn us of dangers foretold, and to guard us against prevailing ill customs and fashionable notions established in many parts of the Christian world. Of this kind are the many Prophecies I have cited, that plainly point out the tyranny and corruption that has prevailed among Christians. We are often warned in the Revelation of St. *John* not to give any encouragement to them ; not to worship the beast, nor receive his mark. And *they* are threatned with utter ruin and destruction that join in the common corruption. On the other hand, eternal life and happiness are promised to those who persevere in pure religion, notwithstanding all the discouragements that may be given by a corrupted and apostate church ; to those who dare suffer the greatest evils rather than forsake the purity of religion.

These warnings are graciously designed by the Almighty to preserve us from misery, and bring us to happiness, by directing us to that virtuous resolution which cannot but have these effects wherever it takes place.

St.

St. John says, *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that bear the words of this Prophecy, and keep those sayings that are written therein*, that is, as appears from the purport of the Prophecy, *keep themselves free from the corruptions foretold*, Rev. i. 3.

### S E C T. XIII.

*Containing the Reasons why the Prophetic parts of Scripture are so little understood.*

**I**T is plain in fact, that the differences of learned men about the meaning of the several prophetic parts of scripture, are very great : and this has occasioned a notion to prevail, that it is in vain to attempt to understand, what so many men, famous in their generations, have so little succeeded in. The common enemy therefore has made this use of the unhappy differences, to play one false notion against another, and to reject all, as equally uncertain. If therefore one can trace out the causes of these errors, it may be some means to prevent the like for the future, and to give encouragement to such as sincerely desire to understand the word of God.

And 1. It does not seem to have been the intention of God, that Many of the Prophecies of the Scriptures should be understood before a certain period of time, in which they were to be opened and explained by certain facts, which should cast a full light upon them. Prophecy was not given to make men able to foretel events ; but when they were foretold,



told, to enable them to see the providence of God governing and directing all things to serve his ends. It is therefore said—*But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*, Dan. xii. 4. And again,—*Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up, and sealed till the time of the end*, ver. 9. Whilst therefore the words are *closed up* and *sealed*, it is not for men to pretend to discover what is contained in them before their time is come. But as the time is come, when many Prophecies are accomplished, and what is made a *mark* of the times, is apparent now,—*viz.* that *knowledge shall be increased*; we may reasonably hope by comparing things together, that one may discover enough to give encouragement to the wise and faithful to proceed. 2. The observation of the language which the Prophets used; the comparing that which is already accomplished, with what still remains; the seeing in what part of the prophetic accounts we now are, will be of great use in the study of Prophecy: but above all, that we carefully observe every thing, and every word, precisely; and not imagine a Prophecy fulfilled, when we see some part of it agreeing to any event. The *whole* must exactly correspond, or else our fancies may pass upon us for the word of God. I would observe then, that,

The 1st and principal cause of the errors of men in interpreting Prophecy has been owing to their not having clear and precise ideas to the words made use of in the prophetic writings. What strange confusion has it made, whilst some of great figure have taken

taken the word *born*, so often used in *Daniel*, for a *king*? And what mistakes did *Junius*, *Grotius*, &c. fall into by nothing else than their not attending to the use of language in this case.

A 2d cause is, that they have not carefully enough studied the history of the Christian Church, and the states subject to Christian powers, or bordering upon them. Now as in the former case, if any one is ignorant of, or mistakes the precise ideas intended by the figurative words, *stars, horns, sun, moon, earth, waters, trees, beast*, &c. he can never come at the intended meaning of the sacred writer; so if he does not understand the history of the Church, or of the powers that govern in the Christian world, or of those who border on them, it is impossible to form any judgment of the times and occurrences that are mentioned.

A 3d cause is, that men having hit upon some event, to which the words of the Prophecy agree in part, they hastily conclude that to be the event foretold; and then rack the other expressions to make all suit to an imaginary Hypothesis. I cannot instance, nor need I, in greater men than our two famous commentators, Dr. *Hammond* and Dr. *Whitby*: the one of which had his *Gnosticks*, the other his *Jews*, constantly in sight, and both of them accordingly forced several prophetic passages from their plain and obvious meanings to a sense, that none but themselves could see. They both brought their respective hypotheses to the New Testament, and then laboured to confirm them from thence, instead

of making the New Testament their rule and guide, and impartially following that. But this leads me to

A 4th cause of this evil, and that is that Christians are divided into sects and parties, and are the *servants of men*. It is not truth; it is not the pure will of Christ that is sought for; but it is to support *local truths*, whatever may be favourable to themselves, or their own notions. *The children of this world are very wise in their generations*: and accordingly the *Lord of heaven and earth hath hid these things from such as are, in this manner, wise and prudent*, at the same time that he has *revealed them to such as have no prejudices, to such as have their Eyes simple, pure, ready to receive light*. This made the Prophet *Jeremiah* cry out—*Behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken; behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, they have no delight therein*, chap. vi. 10. A

5th cause is, that men are apt to be sanguin, and not willing to own any mistakes they fall into. They defend with great eagerness what they have once espoused, and thus go on deceiving and being deceived. The *Roman Catholics* are tied up by the notions they have of *Church*, and *Infallibility*, to go on in the principles they have espoused: and *Protestants* are not free from their byasses, though of another kind. If therefore men are not willing to receive the truth in the love of truth, and purely for its own sake, it is impossible that they should understand the more easy parts of scripture, and much less those that require great application and study. I need not add

6thly.



6thly, That there is required attention, sagacity, skill in languages, skill in history, the order of things, an ability to distinguish what is past from what is to come, the times from whence any Prophecy takes its beginning, what is to be taken figuratively from what is to be taken literally.——These and such things being necessary to understand the prophetic parts of scripture, no wonder that interpreters have made strange work in commenting upon what they are not usually qualified to undertake, through want of some or other of these necessary qualities. And

*Lastly*, There must be owned to be a real difficulty in the things themselves. We have not at present sufficient light to enter into many points which are properly *sealed up* and *closed* from our views, and must be so till the time comes when they shall be unfolded. I do not apprehend, that we yet are clear in the meaning of the *numbers in the last chapter of Daniel*, and of many particulars in the *Revelations*: and probably they will continue dark and little intelligible, till time shall discover their true meaning. In the mean time let us be contented with what we do understand: and not give up what is clear, because there are many things that are not so. There are very many Prophecies in both New and Old Testament which are clear, express, determinate: These may be urged as strong arguments for the continual providence of the great governor of the universe: These may be insisted on against all opposers of revelation: And as we at this distance can see the comple-

tion of them, we have an argument from experience more affecting and more convincing than otherwise can be had of that important truth, that God directs and governs all things. *He that bath ears to hear, let him hear.*

THE

## THE CONCLUSION.

THE great importance and use of Prophecy sufficiently appears from what has been observed : and we cannot be too thankful for so great a blessing ; nor too careful in the study and proper use and application of it.

I think it appears from what has gone before, that many scripture Prophecies both of the Old and New Testament may easily be understood, and known to have been fulfilled, by such as observe what is passing in their own times : but more so by all such as are acquainted with what has passed in the world. It is but to compare what has been foretold with what has happened ; which in many instances requires no great strength of genius or depth of reasoning, in order to judge of their completion. And if our Saviour could bid the people of his time to *search the scriptures*, and the *Bereans* are so much commended for employing themselves in such enquiries, no doubt can be made, but that all mankind may be taught these things, from whence they may reap so many and great benefits.

And if this be the case, how are they excusable who have abilities and learning, leisure and convenient opportunities of enquiring, and proper means of information, to fit them for searching into the more difficult Prophecies of scripture ; and yet take no care



to understand the easiest; especially they whose immediate duty and business it is to teach others whatever useful and important truths are contained in the sacred writings? \*

For my part, I am persuaded, that if such scripture Prophecies were duly considered as may easily be known to have been punctually fulfilled, we should have few or no controversies about the truth of our religion; and many weak and inconclusive arguments would be spared on all sides, and few would be able to withstand the force of such momentous truths. But if men will refuse a clear light, when offered them, and proceed in the dark, or use a dim imperfect light, when they may have a clear and good one, they must take the consequence, and no body need wonder if they lose their way.

One cannot sufficiently admire the various means which God has used in order to convey to us the most beneficial knowledge, and to confirm to us the revelation of his will. If these are fairly considered, we may enjoy the great benefit of divine instructions. But whilst one neglects to enquire into them, another labours for objections against them, and a third lives in open defiance of them, even though he owns their true original, the happy effects of them are lost, and men are answerable for neglecting or abusing of them, instead of being led by them to the most desirable enjoyments,

\* Whoever carefully considers what Mr. *Mede* and Sir *Isaac Newton* have writ upon the Revelation of St. *John*, may understand good part of it. And time (the best comment upon Prophecy) is continually explaining the rest.

ments, to peace and happiness everlasting. Nor ought such men to complain, since the fault is plainly their own, not his who has graciously consulted their welfare in the wisest and best manner.

*Lastly*, If prophecy be duly regarded, religion will certainly flourish; for prophecy gives us a sensible argument of Providence, suited to all capacities. And as we may be sure that God did not give it in vain, we ought to examine, and to consider it, and make a due use of it.

**F I N I S.**



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